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**EXPEDITION
COOKING**
with the
**ENOCH
ROYAL
KNIGHTS**

3

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Expedition Cooking with the Enoch Royal Knights, Volume 3

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Expedition Cooking with the Enoch Royal Knights, Volume 3

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Original Japanese edition published in Japan in 2018 by MICRO MAGAZINE, INC., Tokyo.

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First Digital Edition: July 2023

ISBN-13: 979-8-88560-093-4





"IGNITE!"

THIS TIME, A PILLAR OF FIRE ERUPTED WITH A ROAR. IT CRACKLED AND BURNED, APPEARING UNLIKELY TO VANISH THIS TIME.

"TH-THIS IS...WHAT YOUR ENERGY IS CAPABLE OF, MELLY...?"

ZARA'S EYES WERE WIDE IN ASTONISHMENT. AS FOR ME, ON THE OTHER HAND...

"W-WOOHOOOOO!"

I CRIED OUT WITH GLEE.

Chapter 1: A Shocking Reunion and Candied Nuts

NO magic, no beauty, and no assets. It had already been half a year since I, a sad excuse for a Fore Elf, came to the royal capital. Despite my desire for an office job, I ended up passing an examination that assigned me to the Second Expeditionary Squadron of the Enoch Royal Knights. All of the members of the Second Expeditionary Squadron had very unique personalities. The phrase “birds of a feather flock together” came to mind.

Captain Ludtink was a massive man you had to tilt your head up to look at. He had thick eyebrows, piercing eyes, and a beard that covered the scowl on his lips. On the outside, he was the very picture of a bandit. Even the time he shaved his beard did little to lessen that impression.

Putting that aside, Captain Ludtink was still young at the age of twenty, but he was a brilliant captain, one able to slice monsters in half with a single strike of his great sword, and a capable leader too. Despite all this, he also had a delicate side that showed itself in his displeasure over unappetizing meals and his tendency to burn his tongue on hot food.

Vice Captain Velrey was a beautiful woman who dressed in masculine attire. She was a sincere person, capable of putting a stop to Captain Ludtink’s reckless ideas and mediating between squadmates who found themselves at odds. She was a calming presence in the Second Expeditionary Squadron, not unlike a kind older sister who was open with me and would even let me come to her for advice. However, when it came to monsters, she used her speed to cut them down through repeated attacks of her twin blades. Vice Captain Velrey was the fastest of anyone in the unit, and was also in charge of dispatching orders and tracking enemies.

Garr was a wolfman with red fur and a kind heart as big as his enormous body. He was a multitalented person capable of making forks from sticks and cups from leaves while we were out on our expeditions. Garr was the quiet type who fought with a spear and also served as backup in battles. Garr paid the

most attention to whether I was keeping up on the missions and would be the one to suggest we take breaks. He was a very caring person.

Ulgus, our excellent archer, was a seventeen-year-old boy, making him a year younger than me. He had a childlike personality befitting of his age and, apparently, had started paying more attention to his clothing style recently, wanting to become more popular with the ladies. I didn't get the impression that his efforts were paying off.

Zara was a beautiful man whose crossdressing suited his good looks, although he hadn't been doing it as much anymore. Either way, I couldn't help but be jealous of his pretty face. Zara fought with a long-handled battle ax and engaged in an intense, eye-catching style of combat. He came from a snowy region and had a humble side to his personality as well. The two of us shared needlework and cooking as our hobbies, and once we got talking, we never stopped. He was my closest friend in the squadron, who I saw like an older sister figure—even if he tended to identify as a man.

Our newest member, Liselotte, was a member of the Royal Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau and the daughter of Marquess Lichtenberger. Most people might wonder why a noblewoman would become a knight—she probably did thanks to Amelia, the griffin who'd formed a contract with me. At first, Liselotte fought with Captain Ludtink, who scolded her for joining the Royal Order without being serious about it. He was very strict with her. But that was reasonable of him. Knights put their lives on the line to do battle—that was the nature of the job. You couldn't be a true knight without the proper resolve.

However, Liselotte made it through her first expedition thanks to her natural grit and her love for mythical beasts. Captain Ludtink approved of her hard work too. She's remained a member of the Second Expeditionary Squadron to this day.

Liselotte possessed powerful spells, and her ability to attack from long distance made her an incredibly valuable fighter.

These were my lovely squadmates. The seven of us worked our hardest on our expedition missions.

Even me, who had no fighting skills at all, was still managing to fulfill my

duties as a knight. This was thanks to how all the members of the Second Expeditionary Squadron supported each other.

I hoped to continue serving proudly as a knight from here out as well.



TODAY, Captain Ludtink had ordered me to preserve food to bring on expeditions. I ate my breakfast in the dormitory cafeteria, pondering what to make.

Today's breakfast consisted of rye bread with dried fruit baked inside it, soup with meat still on the bone, and a cheese omelet. These were all some of my favorites. It was delicious, as always. The female knights at my table were friendly and even struck up conversation with me.

A young knight, one who loved to chitchat, sat in front of me. She was eighteen and had told me she came from a distant region to earn some money. With that background in common, we got along well.

"That reminds me," she started, "you know that handsome young knight who comes to the dorm every morning? He told me he was waiting for an elf girl. Is that you?"

I'd heard that I was the only elf in the Royal Order, so she couldn't be referring to anyone else. The handsome young knight had to be Zara, then.

"Yes, I think so," I said.

"I knew it! So are you two dating?"

I almost spit out my soup when that unexpected question struck me. I managed to gulp it down in time.

Ah, that was close.

"You walk to work together every morning, right?" she continued. "You must *really* be in love."

"Y-You've got it all wrong!" I denied. "He walks me to work to stop the other knights from bothering me."

"Oh! Is that right?"

“Yes!”

“I see. I heard there’s a lot of people who want to date him if he’s single,” she told me.

“Goodness...”

When he first came to the Order, Zara looked like a beautiful woman who wore men’s clothes, so he didn’t stand out, even in front of the dorm. But he’d started to look a lot more masculine lately...well, he *was* a man.

Either way, his change in appearance had caused him to stand out, by the sound of it. More and more of the female knights had started to ask me about Zara, but I was only now realizing their true intention.

At this rate, our arrangement was going to end up causing trouble for him. I really needed to move to a new home already, especially with Amelia in my care.

“Kreh kreh!”

Amelia, who was sitting off to the side so as not to disturb breakfast, let out a cry to interrupt our leisurely chat.

“What’s the griffin saying?”

“She says I should hurry or I’ll be late,” I interpreted.

“She’s so dependable.”

“She might even be more dependable than me,” I laughed.

Amelia had only stood less than a foot and a half tall when I first met her, but she was already up to nearly three feet now. That meant she was big enough to eat fruit on her own. She didn’t cry at night either. She was growing into a full-fledged adult griffin. Mythical beasts grew at downright shocking speeds.

“Kreh kreh!”

“I know, I know. I’m hurrying. Ah, pardon me for leaving first,” I said.

“No, it’s fine. See you!”

“Right. See you later!”

I returned my food tray and jogged toward the front gate of the dorm where Zara was waiting.

“Good morning, Zara.”

“Morning, Melly.”

As always, Zara greeted me with a dazzling smile. It was truly a sight for sore eyes.

We chatted about silly things as we walked toward work. After about ten minutes, we arrived at the barracks of the Second Expeditionary Squadron, waiting in the break room until it was time for work to start.

“Good morning, Medic Risurisu!”

Ulgus gave me an energetic greeting. Garr also raised his hand and greeted me with a “Good morning.”

The two appeared to be reading an open newspaper.

“Medic Risurisu, it sounds like there’s going to be a special sale on nuts at the market today. Good thing it’s your shopping day, huh?” Ulgus informed me of the good news from the newspaper.

“Ulgus, this is the day of the big sale every month.”

“Whoa, so you planned for your shopping to land on the same day? That’s our Medic Risurisu for you.”

“But I didn’t know that the nuts would be on sale. Thank you for the information,” I said.

“Anytime.”

Nuts were very nutritious and made for great field rations. I would have to add them to my shopping list.

Liselotte arrived next after my exchange of info with Ulgus.

“Good morning, Liselotte.”

“Good morning.”

She greeted me in a composed manner, but as soon as she saw Amelia, a

smile broke out on her stoic face. She reminded me of an elderly person catching sight of their grandchild. Her love for mythical beasts would never waver—of that, I was sure.

That was when the bell rang, signaling the start of work. We all headed into the captain's office for our morning meeting.

Captain Ludtink read us the report from the previous night. There didn't appear to be any major incidents. After that, he announced the day's tasks.

"Head to the regular meeting after this, Velrey. Garr and Zara, spend the day training. Ulgus is on shopping duty. Lichtenberger, you have studying to do. Finally, Risurisu."

"Yes?"

"Take Amelia and go to the personnel department to greet our new member."

"New member?" I asked him for an explanation.

"I've been asking them to send us someone to clean up around here and take care of the barracks while we're gone, and now they finally assigned a person."

"I-I see!"

So we would be receiving a maid. It sounded like Captain Ludtink had put in the request before I even came to the squadron.

"We're finally getting someone..." Ulgus sounded particularly emotional. Until now, Ulgus and I had taken care of the daily cleaning, being the lowest ranking in the unit.

"That's all for today. Dismissed!" Captain Ludtink said.

Everyone dispersed except for me. I remained in the office to ask the captain a question.

"Excuse me, Captain Ludtink."

"What is it?"

"You never told me the name of the new maid."

"Yeah. It wasn't written on the memo. You should be able to find out at the

personnel department, so don't worry about it."

"Understood."

He didn't know any details as the documents had only arrived suddenly this morning. I figured it would be best to just head to the personnel department.

Amelia and I passed through the hallway connecting the rest of the squadrons and entered a large building with a courtyard dining hall. I walked up to the second floor and knocked on the door at the back of the hallway.

A skinny man with glasses, appearing to be in his forties, opened the door.

"Good morning. I'm Mell Risurisu of the Second Expeditionary Squadron."

"Ah, yes, yes. Thanks for coming in so early."

He explained that the maid was already waiting in the visitor's room. My heart raced, eager to see what sort of person would be assigned to us.

The man led me to the visitor's room in the back of the office. I knocked on the door, heard a "Come in" from inside, opened the door, and saw...

My eyes shot straight to a pair of ears that perked up. Then there was the tail so fluffy that it was impossible to ignore.

The girl, dressed in a work uniform, looked to be about twelve or thirteen years old, with silver hair, dark skin, and big, amber eyes. She was someone I recognized.

"Whoa! It's Charlotte!!" I exclaimed.

"Mell!!" Charlotte stood up and raced toward me. "I missed you!" She wrapped her arms around me.



“I’ve missed you too! Wait, you learned this country’s language, didn’t you?!”

Charlotte, a fox girl, had been forcibly brought to this country from a foreign land as part of the slave trade. The knights said they would take guardianship of her for a while, but if she was wearing a uniform, it must mean she was working for them.

“It was determined that her home forest burned down in a wildfire, so she had nowhere to return to,” the man explained.

“Oh, I see.” It was a slave trader who caught Charlotte as she fled the forest. “Charlotte... You’ve been through so much...” I tightened my arms around Charlotte.

“It’s all right. They said no more scary things,” she said.

“That’s right!”

She must have been learning the language ever since the knights took her in.

“She isn’t very fluent yet, but she strongly desired a place to work, so we made arrangements for her.” The man explained that he was unsure of where to deploy Charlotte, but since she expressed a desire to see me, he decided he may as well send her to the Second Expeditionary Squadron. “I’m sorry for the burden, but I hope you can teach her more of our language during your time together.”

“Of course I will.” I whispered into Charlotte’s ear, “Let’s do our best together.”

Charlotte separated from me, smiled, and nodded.

It had only been roughly a month since the incident where I met Charlotte was resolved. Charlotte must have been putting a lot of work into her language studies.

“Amelia!”

I could tell she’d been looking forward to her reunion with Amelia.

“Cute. She is cute.”

“Kreh!”

Charlotte wrapped her arms around Amelia and nuzzled their cheeks together.

“XX, XXX...!”

In the middle of all this, she began to speak in her native language. I didn’t understand it, but her ears were twitching, and her tail was wagging from side to side. I could tell she was very happy.

“This is a relief.” The man from the personnel department murmured that remark under his breath. It appeared he’d never seen Charlotte with such a cheerful smile on her face before.

“Don’t worry. I’ll take good care of her.”

The man proceeded to explain the situation surrounding Charlotte.

Charlotte was currently under the official guardianship of a philanthropic family. She used their financial support for her studies and daily expenses, and she stayed at the women’s dorm with the other maids.

“Her working hours will be the same as the other knights,” he said. “She also says she’ll do any odd jobs needed of her in addition to cleaning. While you’re away on expeditions, she’ll take care of the barracks by receiving documents and such.”

“All right, I’ll let the others know,” I said.

“Please take good care of her.”

“Just leave it to me.” I pumped my fist to my chest as I answered. “All right, Charlotte. Let’s get going.”

“Okay!”

She appeared to have about 40 percent listening comprehension and 20 percent reading comprehension. We could probably get by with gestures when there was something she didn’t understand.

“Charlotte, let’s go introduce you to the squadmates,” I said.

“*Skwaaaaad mahte?*”

“It’s ‘squadmates,’” I corrected, speaking the word slowly.

“What is squadmates?”

“They’re the people we work together with... Um...” It was actually a hard word to define. I tried to make it easier for her to understand. “How do I put it? They’re like...family.”

“Family?”

“That’s right. Garr is the dad, and Zara is the mom.”

Zara being the mom didn’t quite feel right, but he was pretty and a good cook, and there was really no better fit for the role.

“Vice Captain Velrey is the big sister, Ulgus is the little brother, Liselotte is the little sister...” When I explained how everyone was like a family, the stiffened expression on Charlotte’s face softened. “And then there’s Captain Ludtink... He’s just a bandit.”

“Mell...what is *ban...duht*?”

Her question snapped me out of it.

“Ah, that’s not right. Bandits have nothing to do with this. Captain Ludtink is...” The only way I could think to describe him was as a scary-looking boy from the neighborhood. “Um... Let’s see...”

“I will look. I will decide.”

“Ah, okay, right.”

She agreed to save her judgment until after she saw the captain with her own two eyes.

“Mom, Dad, big sister, little brother, little sister. I am excited to meet them! Bandit too!”

“The bandit...might be a little scary...”

“Hmm?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

Charlotte and I walked down the hallway holding hands. The passing knights were startled by the sight of us.

“Whoa, why’s there an elf and beastfolk here?! I thought I was whisked away to the middle of the forest for a second!”

“Me too!”

Don’t worry, this is the capital city. I quietly informed them in my mind.

I knew it wasn’t common to find a Fore Elf and fox girl in the city. It wasn’t unreasonable to be so confused by the sight of us, especially together.



WE returned to the Second Expeditionary Squadron by the same path I took to leave.

Zara and Garr were out training in the plaza.

“Wow!” Charlotte’s eyes went wide when she heard the sound of weapons colliding.

The two men paused their training upon noticing that we were watching.

“Welcome back, Melly.”

“Here we are.” I began by introducing them to Charlotte. “Garr, Zara. This is Charlotte, the person dispatched to our unit.”

Charlotte bowed to them. I looked over at her face and saw that she seemed nervous.

“Charlotte, the person on the right is Garr. He’s the dad. The person on the left is Zara, the mom.”

Her eyes lit up when she heard my explanation. “Papa Garr! Mama Zara!”

The pair cocked their heads at the strange description. I decided to fill them in.

“Sorry about that. I taught Charlotte that we’re all like a family to make her feel more comfortable.”

“Oh my. I see,” Zara said.

“I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“It’s no biggy. I know Charlotte’s had a rough time.” Zara smiled gently at

Charlotte and opened up his arms. The girl's eyes lit up and she jumped into the hug.

"Mama Zara!"

"It's very nice to meet you, Charlotte."

"Uh-huh!"

Good for her. I thought she might be shy around any member who wasn't me, but surprisingly, she seemed to have an outgoing and friendly personality.

Garr spread his arms just like Zara, causing Charlotte to fly over to him next.

"Papa Garr... Soft and fluffy..."

Her tail wagged as she rubbed her cheek against him.

I'm so jealous of Charlotte. I wanna hug Garr and nuzzle his fur too.

After that, I led her into the barracks and found Vice Captain Velrey just returning from her meeting. "Thanks for picking her up, Medic Risurisu."

"Of course. This is Charlotte, our new member."

"Oh, it's the girl from before."

"That's right!"

I learned that Vice Captain Velrey was the one who took Charlotte from the slave auction and brought her back to the Order's headquarters. I could tell that Charlotte remembered her by the way her ears perked up and her tail started to wag.

"Charlotte, this is Vice Captain Velrey. She's the big sister."

"Big Sister Anna! She rescued me."

"So I've heard," I said.

Charlotte leaped up in the air before racing to hug the vice captain.

"Whoa!" She caught the girl and stroked her head. "You learned our language, didn't you? Great job."

"Yeah!"

This seemed like the right time to explain the family backstory to Vice Captain Velrey.

“Oh, I see. That seems like a smart way of putting it. I guess that means I’m Charlotte’s big sister starting today.” Vice Captain Velrey wrapped her arm snugly around Charlotte’s shoulder. Having the vice captain as a big sister must be nice. I wished I could be in Charlotte’s shoes.

Perhaps noticing my envious gaze, Vice Captain Velrey extended her right arm to me. I eagerly dove into her hug. With Charlotte to her left and me to her right, she murmured under her breath, “A beauty on each side.”

Charlotte reacted to this. “A beauty?”

“No, it’s nothing.” The vice captain patted us on the back and released her grip. She told us she was going to join Zara and Garr’s training session. “All right, Charlotte. I’ll see you soon.”

“Right. See you, Big Sister Anna!” Charlotte waved goodbye until she couldn’t see the vice captain anymore.

We took a walk down the hallway and I showed Charlotte each room.

“This is the storeroom.”

“Storeroom?”

“It’s a place to put unneeded things.”

“Unneeded...things?”

“Um, let’s see...” I opened the door and explained what was inside. Seeing the garbage seemed to help her understand.

The next place I showed her was the break room.

“This is a place to take breaks.”

“Break... It’s broken?”

“Not that kind of break. It’s here to rest...no, that might be too complex.”

“Kreh kreh! Kreh kreh kreh!”

Amelia set out to explain it to Charlotte too. She was saying something like,

"There are five breaks in a day, and lunch break is the longest!" But of course, her words were lost on Charlotte.

"Let me show you the break room..." She probably needed to see the interior of this room too, so I opened up the door.

"Whoa!"

It was Ulgus who cried out. He turned around to look at us, a startled expression on his face.

"You scared me, Medic Risurisu!"

"I'm sorry. I didn't know anyone was in here."

"No, it's fine. I'm sorry too." He appeared to be preparing for his shopping trip.

"I thought you left for the market already," I said.

"I was supposed to be, but Captain Ludtink ended up assigning me some random chores."

"I see."

It was at this point that I realized Charlotte was hiding behind me. I needed to introduce them to each other, but before I did, I explained the family backstory to Ulgus.

"Pardon me, Ulgus. The fox girl we previously rescued is going to be working with us from now on."

"Ah! It's that girl!"

"Exactly."

Ulgus clearly remembered Charlotte too.

"I also taught her about her squadmates like we're a family unit."

"I see. That probably makes it easier."

"So you're Charlotte's little brother, Ulgus."

"L-Little brother?! Why?!"

"Because that's exactly what you're like," I insisted.

Charlotte was the younger of the two, but nothing about Ulgus particularly seemed like the big brother type. Ulgus was displeased, judging by the look on his face, but there was no changing this outcome. He simply didn't act like a big brother.

"Charlotte, this is June Ulgus. He's the little brother," I repeated.

"Ulgus! Little brother!"

She had the hang of it. Ulgus looked like a puppy who'd been abandoned in the rain. That was what made him such a little brother.

"Charlotte, this is where we sit on couches, drink tea, and eat sweets." Even now, I was using hand gestures and body language to get by. Charlotte nodded, seeming to understand one way or another.

"Ah, Medic Risurisu. I'm gonna head out to do the shopping now."

"Of course. See you later!"

Charlotte also waved her hand to say goodbye to Ulgus on his way out.

"See you later, June!"

"I'm really just 'June'?! Well, I guess it's fine..."

Ulgus was being addressed by a younger girl without any honorifics, but he accepted it in the end without any resistance. He seemed happier to see her say goodbye to him, heading out with lighter steps.

"Okay, Charlotte. Let's get back to the grand tour," I said.

"Okay!"

The last place I took her was the captain's office—currently occupied by Captain Ludtink.

"This is where Captain Ludtink of the Second Expeditionary Squadron does his work."

How do I introduce the captain to her? I haven't come up with any clever ideas yet.

"Work here?!"

“Yes, the captain does.”

“Captain?”

“Ah... Um, that’s the bandit I mentioned.”

“Ah! Bandit!”

Captain Ludtink was a difficult person to explain. Try as I might to search for accurate words, “bandit” was still the only thing that came to mind.

Amelia decided to add a bit of her own explanation here as well. “Kreh kreh, kreh kreh kreh!”

Amelia’s words translated to *“His name is Crow Ludtink and he’s the son of an earl.”* It was a more detailed explanation than mine. However, Charlotte didn’t comprehend any of it.

I knocked on the door, heard him call for us to enter, and moved inside his office.

“Captain Ludtink, I’ve brought our new member... I’ve brought Charlotte.”

“Good.” Captain Ludtink’s eyes went wide when he spotted her. He must not have expected this development.

Charlotte was hiding behind my back, but she emerged a single step forward to introduce herself. “Nice to meet you. My name is Charlotte.”

Oh, well done! She introduced herself without any fear. I patted her head and praised her.

“Mell, this man is bandit?”

“If I had to choose a word...”

“Hey! Who the hell’re you callin’ a bandit?!”

Captain! If you yell like that all of a sudden, you might scare her! I wrapped her small body in my arms to protect her.

But fortunately, Charlotte wasn’t put off by him at all.

“Mell, he says he is ‘bandit’!”

“Ah, yes.” I nodded.

Captain Ludtink's use of that word was by no means an introduction.

"Risurisu...I'll remember this..." He glared at me with a menacing, bandit-like look.

For now, his temporary role was that of a bandit.

I was explaining the cleaning tools and methods to Charlotte when Liselotte returned from her studies.

"Oh my. Who's this?"

"She's Charlotte, the fox girl we rescued."

"I thought I recognized her."

Charlotte went to hide behind me again, peering out at Liselotte stealthily.

"Hello. My name is Liselotte. My last name is Lichtenberger."

"Liselotte!" Charlotte's state of alert faded as soon as she saw Liselotte's big smile. "Mell, Liselotte is little sister?"

"Ah, well, sure. That's right."

"Little sister? What does she mean, Mell?"

"Well, you see..." I explained the family backstory once again to Liselotte now.

"I see what you were trying to do."

"Vice Captain Velrey is the big sister, so I thought you would be a good little sister."

"I'm supposed to be this girl's little sister? Even though I'm older?"

Flustered, I tried to explain, "B-But you see! You might have a little sister in the future, or you might become a big sister, right? But you don't have a big sister, so you can never become a little sister!"

"I suppose...that's true."

I was just throwing whatever explanation I could think of at her, but it appeared to have worked.

"Should I call her Big Sister Charlotte?"

“Um, well, do as you please.”

“Big Sister Charlotte,” Liselotte tried it out. Charlotte nodded happily.

“Liselotte? What is it?”

“I was just calling your name.”

“I see.”

The two smiled at each other. It seemed to be a good outcome in the end.

I was happy as long as they were happy.



AFTER introducing her to our squadmates and showing her around the barracks, I asked Charlotte to help me make food provisions. Ulgus’s purchases were sitting out in the Second Expeditionary Squadron’s small kitchen.

“Charlotte, I want you to help me do some cooking,” I said.

“Cooking! I can do that!”

“Thanks, I appreciate it.”

We would be preparing the nuts that had been on sale. They would make for great sweets to take on expeditions. The first step was to crack the nuts.

“It takes quite a bit of strength...” I handed her the mortar and kept an eye on her. But Charlotte’s expression remained unchanged as she cracked nut after nut. Maybe that was just how beastfolk were. They seemed to be particularly strong.

I took the nuts Charlotte cracked and roasted them in a pot to improve their flavor.

“It smells good!” Her tail was wagging as she stared into the pot.

“Charlotte, would you mind stirring it a bit?” Once I gestured to show what I meant, she readily agreed. I started to chop the dried fruit while the nuts roasted. I poured the nuts into a bowl once they were finished and mixed them with the fruit, then added wheat flour. “The next step is to add honey and distilled liquor.”

The liquor helped them stay good for longer.

After mixing the ingredients, I scooped out bites and rolled them into balls. Finally, I covered them with powdered palm flour as the finishing touch in my candied nuts. These were the perfect, nutrient-packed snacks to take on expeditions. They were filling, being a condensed ball of nuts and dried fruit, and satisfying to eat in how long they took to chew.

“Charlotte, say ‘aaah’!”

“Aaah?”

I carried some finished candied nuts up to Charlotte’s mouth. As she chewed, her amber eyes started to light up. She swallowed the bite, grabbed my hand, and gave me her heartfelt impressions.

“Mell, so many sweet nuts! All the different tastes are yummy!”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

I tried one of the clusters for myself. It had a nice crunchy texture, and it filled my mouth with the taste of fragrant nuts and sweet and sour dried fruit. It was simple, but delicious.

“I cook like this every day. I want you to help me too, Charlotte.” I held my hand out for Charlotte. She reached out and squeezed it right away. Then she smiled at me.

“I work hard with you.”

“Thank you, Charlotte.”

The Second Expeditionary Squadron had gained a new member. I hoped to support her, both now and in the future.



Chapter 2: Cooking with Potatoes in the Tropical Rainforest

AS soon as I got to work, Captain Ludtink announced a new mission.

“We’re going to a tropical rainforest in the Shilque region. Let’s get a move on! Risurisu, prepare for the expedition.”

“Ah, right.”

“We need enough food for three days.”

“Understood.”

Apparently, there wasn’t even enough time for a morning meeting. I headed to the food shed and found Charlotte already beginning to pack.

“Good morning, Charlotte.”

“Mell. Morning.”

It seemed that Captain Ludtink told her to help us prepare for the mission too.

“What will you bring?” she asked me.

“Please round up all the bread and jerky here.”

“Okay.”

Charlotte’s listening comprehension had improved a lot. This was thanks to the hard work she was always putting into her studies. Her speech was still stilted, but that just made her cuter and wasn’t a big issue.

“We also need to prepare some fruit for Amelia. Please pack three of those jars of dried fruit, Charlotte.”

“Huh? Amelia go on expedition too?”

“That’s right.”

“But she still child?”

“She can’t be apart from me.”

“Oh...”

Charlotte had a sad look on her face, telling me she thought she would get to stay at the base with Amelia.

Amelia looked full-grown, but that wasn't the case. Lord Lichtenberger, director of the Royal Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau, and Liselotte both told me I shouldn't be apart from her for very long.

“Charlotte, let's make sweets together when I get back.”

My suggestion caused a bit of relief to show on her face.

“Don't get hurt, Mell. Come back soon.”

“I will. I promise.” I squeezed her hand before bidding her farewell for a few days.

“You too, Amelia.”

“Kreh!”

She gave Amelia a hug to say goodbye.



THE destination for today's mission was the Shilque region. It took about a day and a half to reach it by carriage. Captain Ludtink, Vice Captain Velrey, and Garr took turns steering the carriage half a day each. We stopped at villages to eat, not wanting to deplete rations outside of our mission destination in case the search was prolonged.

Finally, we arrived in Shilque. Our mission was to locate a missing scholar in the tropical rainforest.

Captain Ludtink crossed his arms, looking rather cross as he spoke. “Why do so many people have to wander off and go missing? Don't they care about being a nuisance?!”

We'd been told that the local Shilque Knights had been searching for the scholar, but were unable to find him even after three days. They told us what we needed to know in the village, then moved to the tropical rainforest in question. It was located about an hour away from the village, with thick trees

packed together densely to form the forest.

“Ugh! It’s so damp.” Ulgus sounded annoyed.

Just standing was enough to draw sweat to your brow in such a humid area. It wasn’t unlike the southern island where we found Amelia, but that was a well-lit forest with sunlight pouring in. The sky here was cloudy, and the inner forest dark.

“This place is full of monsters. Be sure to stick to the line,” the captain ordered.

We would be moving out in a line formation. Captain Ludtink was at the front, followed by Garr, Ulgus, Amelia, me, Zara, Liselotte, and Vice Captain Velrey.

“It sure is moist here, all right.” Zara sounded just as annoyed—his hair was curling and frizzing in the humidity. The wet ground squished beneath our feet, and bugs were everywhere.

“Ah!!” Ulgus cried.

“What’s wrong?!”

Ulgus slipped on some slick, dead leaves and fell to the ground. His inattention earned a punishment from Captain Ludtink, who ground his fist into Ulgus’s head. It looked very painful.

“Oooowww!”

“Watch where you’re walkin’, Ulgus!”

“Yes, sir. I will.”

There were fallen trees all over the place and the ground was muddy. With all the obstacles, it was hard to move forward at all.

“Eek!” The next scream came from Liselotte. She clung to Vice Captain Velrey as she shouted. “There’s something weird on my neck!”

“This is...!” The vice captain called me over at once.

I looked at Liselotte’s neck and saw what looked like a short, stubby earthworm wrapped around it. These were a tricky sort of bug that we had in the Fore Elf Forest.

“E-Eww!!” Liselotte moaned. “What is it?!”

“It’s a bloodsucker,” I explained. “You can’t just rip it off. It’s suctioned to your neck right now, so forcing it off will leave part of the bug’s skin on you.”

“Nooooo!” she shrieked.

“Please hold still, Liselotte,” I ordered. “I’m going to burn it off.”

Vice Captain Velrey squeezed Liselotte tightly so that she wouldn’t move.

First, I removed my copper bracelet—the symbol of my knighthood. Then I lit it with a match. By holding the burning bracelet up to the bloodsucker, it quickly dropped off her neck.

Captain Ludtink stomped it on the ground to finish it off.

“You’re all right now, Liselotte,” I assured her.

“Th-Thank you.”

There was blood where the bug had attached to her skin. I wiped the wound clean and applied an ointment.

“I thought it was a drop of water that fell on me, but when I reached up to wipe it away, it wasn’t water...”

The bloodsucker must have dropped down on her from above. How frightening.

“Please be careful too, Ulgus,” I stressed.

“Urk! I’ll have to be careful of both above and below now.”

They didn’t carry parasites or germs like ticks, but bloodsuckers really did take in a lot of blood. They could even suck blood from outside your clothes, annoyingly enough. Their saliva also contained a component that stopped blood from clotting, so having one suck your blood could result in quite the mess.

“Bloodsuckers are said to approach people when they sense their body heat and breathing,” I informed the squad.

Captain Ludtink clicked his tongue and began to mutter under his breath, “So you can’t even protect yourself from ’em.”

“That’s not true. In addition to fire, the bloodsuckers also hate salt.” I took my water out of my bag, added some salt, and shook it up. Then I rubbed the salt water over all my exposed skin. “Lots of bloodsuckers come out during the rainy season, so when we Fore Elves went into the woods, we soaked our socks and towels in salt water.”

“Goodness, Melly. I had no idea you had to go to so much trouble.” Zara was startled by this. There were no bloodsuckers in snowy lands, so stories of them probably sounded unbelievable to him.

There were so many bugs buzzing around us right now, I decided to mix my peppermint powder into a bit of water, kneaded it into a paste, and distributed it to the others to rub on their necks.

“Peppermint is said to have properties that bugs prefer to avoid,” I explained. “That makes it a way of repelling insects. It’s not foolproof, as some bugs don’t mind peppermint, but I don’t think such bugs will be in a tropical rainforest.”

I spread the paste on Amelia’s claws too, then covered her head in a bonnet.

“Kreh kreh!”

She didn’t seem too pleased with the boring brown color of this bonnet. But I needed her to accept it for now.

“I’ll give you a cute ribbon when we return from the expedition, Amelia.”

“Kreh kreh!”

That seemed to convince her.

Now that the bugs were repelled, we continued forward.

Fights against monsters broke out along the way. There was a giant mouse, looming centipede, crazed birds, and so many others that I lost track. The brilliant Second Expeditionary Squadron struck down their numbers with ease. This happened about five times. There was no shortage of monsters in this area.

Zara planted the sharp end of his ax into the ground, leaned his chin against the handle, and sighed. “I’ve just about had it. Are you doing all right, Melly?”

“I’m fine. What about you, Zara?”

“Me too. I’m still fine.”

I couldn’t help them out during the battles, but I had my own work to do afterwards. I made sure everyone was unharmed and treated them if they were wounded. It was a relief to see that the most recent fight hadn’t left anyone severely injured.

Still, where did that scholar get off to? I couldn’t see any signs of a person passing through this area. We could track him if there were traces of him to follow, but not even the knights who searched for three days managed to find him, and they knew this area.

We decided to rest after the sixth battle. The squad members ate their rations and rehydrated with water. I distributed the candied nuts I made with Charlotte to them.

“Wow, Medic Risurisu! These are so good!”

“I was only able to make them because you told me about the sale on nuts, Ulgus.”

Ulgus smiled back at me. “I’ll be sure to search for future sales too!”

“Yes, please do.” I was about to sit down on some dry grass when I froze up, spotting some food.

“Is something wrong, Medic Risurisu?”

“I see leafy potatoes.”

“Oh, is that what those are?”

“Yes.”

The leaves were bigger than my face and attached to thick stems. The giant leaf was the food’s unique feature, earning it the name “leafy potato.” The leaves and stems of the leafy potatoes looked to be a size larger than the ones I’d seen in the Fore Elf Forest.

Perhaps even the tubers themselves were big too. Curious, I tried to pull one out...

“Grrr! Grrrrrrrrrr!” I just couldn’t get it out of the ground.

“Kreh kreh!”

Amelia offered to help me. She clamped down on a stem with her beak and tugged...but it didn't budge. *Just how deep is this thing in the ground...?*

“I'll get that for you, Medic Risurisu.”

“Thank you.”

Ulgus grabbed the leafy potato in two hands and yanked as hard as he could.

“Heave, ho...! Ngh!”

By the look of it, not even Ulgus could get the potato out by his own strength.

While we were at a loss with the situation, Garr came over to us and pulled the potato right out.

“You never disappoint, Garr!” I exclaimed, delighted.

“I can't believe it only took you one try!”

The root of the leafy potato was covered in many seeds—however, these were actually enlarged roots themselves, only called seeds because of their similar appearance. I washed the mud off in the nearby spring water.

“Let's get a move on, Risurisu,” Captain Ludtink called.

“Okay!”

We continued forward without a path to follow, and still didn't find any trace of the scholar. *There are so many monsters here. Is the scholar even safe?*

“At this rate, we'll be lookin' for a body.” Captain Ludtink breathed a grave reminder. There were still no signs of the man after another hour of searching.

“Break time.” Captain Ludtink sounded annoyed with that order.

It was past lunchtime now, so we decided to eat. Of course, I was already planning on cooking with the leafy potatoes I found earlier.

A unique trait of the leafy potatoes was their unusually sticky texture. This made them delicious when simmered. I washed off the sticky potatoes with the spring water I found. Then I peeled them.

First, I poured oil into my pot and stir-fried the leafy potatoes. Once they

were decently cooked, I added liquor, sugar, and oyster sauce, then boiled them down together. Thus, my “sweet and salty stir-fried leafy potatoes” were complete.

Their rich flavor meant they would be delicious as a topping on bread.

“Food is ready,” I announced.

I fed Amelia some dried fruit too. She munched it down happily.

Everyone looked rather pale in the face. The heat of this forest seemed to be sapping their strength. Captain Ludtink and Garr didn’t seem to be doing too bad, but the slender Zara and Ulgus looked especially worn out. The two of them merely stared at their food in a daze, reluctant to take a bite. Perhaps I’d cut the potatoes a bit too large. A knight’s body was their capital. At this rate, the mission was at risk of failure.

I smashed up the sweet and salty potatoes in my mortar to turn them into a paste that was easier to consume. Then I spread it on top of some bread.

“Ulgus, I ground them up so they’re easier to eat. There’s some for you too, Zara.”

“Th-Thanks a bunch.”

But Ulgus’s eyes remained dead inside. He didn’t reach for the bread. Zara, on the other hand, took it, smiled, and thanked me.

“Thanks, Melly.”

“No problem. I just hope you like it.”

Zara tried my creation first. “Oh my. How strange. It’s a potato, but it feels so silky on the tongue. I just love this sweet and salty flavoring you’ve given it too.”

It seemed like he’d expected it to taste different. Leafy potatoes may resemble normal potatoes, but they’re not soft and fluffy in the same way. They’re tender in texture with a faint sweetness to them.

Once he heard Zara’s reaction, Ulgus bit right into his bread too. “This is better than I thought it would be, Medic Risurisu.” I could tell Ulgus must have been disappointed when he thought these were just normal potatoes. “I have a lot of siblings in my family, so my whole life, we were always eating potatoes,”

he said.

“Is that so, Ulgus?”

“But now I’ve got you to make delicious food for me, Medic Risurisu, so I’m really happy!”

Ulgus was such a nice boy. I wanted to pat his head.



WE returned to the search after lunch.

Step after step, we pressed onward, brushing trees and plants out of our way.

“Kreh!”

Amelia suddenly froze. She pointed her beak at the ground.

“What is it, Amelia?”

“Kreh kreh!”

“Ah!”

She had found more leafy potatoes.

“That’s such a big leaf! I just know the potato down there is massive!” I stroked Amelia’s head and called her a good girl.

“Risurisu! Stop diggin’ for potatoes when there’s work to do!”

“I know.”

I wanted to take them back with me if possible. I poked a hole in the stem and tied a ribbon around it to mark it on our way back.

“...Huh?” When I crouched down, I realized there was a scrap of white cloth on the ground. The brown stain on it could only be blood. “L-Look at this...!”

“What is it, Risurisu?”

“Take a look, Captain Ludtink. I found what looks like a torn piece of clothing.”

I handed it to him. The scrap was still fresh. *Could this be anything else but a piece of the scholar’s clothing?*

“Kreh, kreh kreh!”

“What’s she saying?” he asked.

“Um, she says she senses magical energy in the blood on the cloth, so she might be able to search for the scholar by following the magical energy.”

“I see. Give it a try, then.”

I took the cloth back and moved it near Amelia. “What do you say, Amelia?”

“Kreh, kreh kreh!” She said she managed to sense some magical energy. She would search for the person with that same level of energy. “Kreh... Kreh!!”

“R-Really?”

“What’d she say this time, Risurisu?”

“Yes, well...”

Amelia said that the scholar was above us. *But what could that mean?*

“She might be able to hear more if we hold her up toward the source of the magical energy.” I tried to lift Amelia up, but... “So heavy!”

Her body was almost three feet long now, and she weighed more than me. Amelia was too heavy to lift.

“Kreh...”

“Ah, I’m sorry.”

She was a young girl herself. Calling her heavy was clearly taboo.

“Fine, I’ll do—”

“Kreh!”

Captain Ludtink tried to volunteer to lift her, but Amelia pecked her beak at him.

“Whoa! What’s the matter?!”

“Kreh kreh!”

She told me she didn’t want the captain to touch her. Captain Ludtink’s hands were sort of sad to look at, held out with nowhere to go.

“Um... What should we do now?” I wondered.

It was then that Garr volunteered to lift Amelia up.

“Amelia, are you okay with Garr lifting you?” I asked.

“Kreh!”

She didn’t have any problem with Garr, so he scooped her up and lifted her into the air. Amelia was most likely heavier than me, but Garr held her over his head like she was feather-light.

She seemed to enjoy being lifted up like a child. *No, Amelia, this isn’t a good time to be wagging your tail.*

“How’s it going, Amelia? Do you sense anything?” I asked her.

“Kreeeeh... Kreh?”

Her feathers puffed up. Maybe she heard something.

“Kreh, kreh kreh, kreh!”

“Huh?!”

“What’d she say, Risurisu?”

Captain Ludtink’s bandit face leaned in close to mine. *So scary! No, wait, I need to tell him about this big development.*

“Well, someone far from here...probably the scholar, is being attacked by monsters.”

“He’s what?!”

The direction of the magical energy had to be where that man was. We needed to rescue him and fast.

“Which way?”

“She says it’s the direction we’re heading in.”

“Got it. Let’s get a move on!”

We raced toward our destination.

After another five minutes or so of running, we saw a person in front of us—almost certainly the scholar.

“Eeeeeek! Get away from meeee!!” he shrieked.

There stood a bug-like monster with large sickles for hands. It had an inverted triangle-shaped head and a slender body that was bright yellow-green. It looked to be about eight feet tall—quite large indeed.

“It’s a great mantis.” Vice Captain Velrey revealed its name to me.

The scholar had climbed up a tree to survive the attack, but the monster was in the process of spreading its wings to fly up to him.

Ulgus shot an arrow straight at the monster. It pierced the bug’s wings perfectly, sending the great mantis crumbling down to the ground.

It whipped its head around—ignoring the scholar to target us instead.

“All units, take out that monster!” Captain Ludtink’s orders were simple but difficult nonetheless.

Everyone shot into motion. Amelia, Liselotte, and I retreated.

The great mantis raised its giant scythes. But the only thing they collided with was Captain Ludtink’s sword.

“Take that!”

It was like a battle of strength between the scythe and the sword, but Captain Ludtink’s great sword was victorious. The great mantis stumbled backwards.

That was when Zara saw the opportunity to slash into its neck with his battle ax. The mantis’s head went flying straight back, but then...

“Whoa!” Ulgus cried out in surprise.

The mantis should’ve collapsed, but it actually continued moving without its head. It charged forward, swinging both scythes.

“Th-That’s so creepy!” I couldn’t help but shout aloud.

“Medic Risurisu, you can’t let your guard down yet!”

“R-Right.”

Ulgus, as he watched out for me, readied his bow in preparation to strike at any moment. Then there was Liselotte, who held up her staff as she murmured

some sort of spell under her breath.

The fight against the headless mantis continued.

Vice Captain Velrey cut down one of the scythes. Garr swept it out of reach from the mantis.

“All units, fall back!” Vice Captain Velrey’s cry prompted everyone to retreat from the area near the great mantis. It was just then that a magic circle materialized under the monster’s feet. Liselotte cried out her spell.

“Cauterizing flames!”

A pillar of fire burst out of the magic circle, turning the great mantis to ash. Its massive body toppled to the ground with a thud.

“You did it!” I gave a standing ovation for Liselotte and the success of her spell.

“Save the scholar, Ulgus.”

“Ah! Right!”

That was the story of how we successfully rescued the missing scholar.



“THANK you all! You saved my life!”

The scholar told us that, once they were attacked by monsters in a pouring rainstorm, he became separated from his guards and guides. That was how he ended up alone like this. He wandered the tropical rainforest for a few days, surviving off of only snakes and lizards.

“He ate snakes and lizards...”

The sensitive Captain Ludtink couldn’t help but react. I’d heard that snakes were surprisingly tasty, not that I wanted to try one myself.

But all that mattered was that the scholar was safe.



WE were swarmed by people from the research party when we arrived at the nearby village. That was when we learned that this scholar was one of the most

prominent authorities on vegetation research in the kingdom. Everyone from the party gave us their utmost thanks.

With our mission completed, we spent another day and a half returning to the royal capital.

Charlotte was waiting for us at the barracks of the Second Expeditionary Squadron.

“Welcome back, Mell!”

“It’s good to be back, Charlotte.” I hugged her when she ran up to me.

Captain Ludtink came to us next. “Hey, Charlotte? You didn’t get up to no good while we were gone, did you?”

“No, I was good girl! Did you do good too, Bandit?”

Charlotte had a big grin on her face as she asked him that. The captain’s own smile started to twitch, so I answered for him instead.

“Um...well, Bandit was a good boy too.”

“I see! That is good!”

...It went without saying that Captain Ludtink gave me a scolding when Charlotte wasn’t around.

Chapter 3: Noodles with Slime Sauce

THE expeditionary squadrons were already hard at work from the start of the morning. I walked with Zara to the barracks as I murmured, “Something must have happened.”

We happened to run into Liselotte at the front gates.

“They sure are busy so early in the morning,” she commented.

“I had the same thought.”

I prayed that this had nothing to do with our unit as we headed to the morning meeting. But those prayers weren’t answered. Captain Ludtink informed us of an urgent mission.

“I know this is sudden, but we’ve had orders come in.”

Of course we did, I responded in my mind. He informed us that something had happened at a food production factory outside of the city.

“We’re heading to a gelatin factory.”

Gelatin was an animal protein used in food like gelatin desserts and marshmallows, but it was also used as an adhesive for wood, a poultice in medical care, and even in lipstick. It was a very versatile product.

But then I learned something shocking. Captain Ludtink told us that the gelatin factory kept caged creatures they could use as ingredients. But they had just escaped from the premises. I’d always thought that the material used in gelatin was brought in from distant regions, but it appeared I was wrong about that...

Half of the expeditionary squadrons were sent out on a recovery mission.

“So this is a recovery, not a search party?” I asked.

“Yeah, since they’re slimes,” Captain Ludtink responded. “It’s hard to search for somethin’ like that while it’s alive.”

“What? Can you say that again?”

I could have sworn I just heard the word “slime” come out of his mouth.

Slimes were a type of gelatinous monster. Some turned into monsters by absorbing the magical energy from the marshy areas of swamps, while others came to be when the body of a dead monster gained a new core from a different organism. There were different varieties like that.

I gulped, imagining what they must look like, but it turned out that the factory slimes weren’t like the ones in the wild.

“They’re making artificial slimes out of clean lake water at that factory,” the captain informed me.

“I-I see.”

Who knew that gelatin came from slimes? I couldn’t believe I’d been eating gelatin desserts and marshmallows with slime in them all this time... Although, these artificial slimes were supposedly of a different makeup than natural slimes.

“It’s some miracle ingredient that the Magic Research Bureau and Monster Research Bureau came up with,” Captain Ludtink explained. “They say that’s the reason why gelatin desserts are a food anyone can get their hands on easily, not just the nobles anymore.”

“That’s interesting...”

So these shady sounding bureaus had actually been producing real results. I probably shouldn’t call them shady anymore.

“Now, about this mission...”

The captain explained that the incident at the factory had not, in fact, been an accident. Someone caused it deliberately. This meant that one of the culprit’s potential goals might have been to send the Order into disarray. Captain Ludtink warned us to be careful in how we chose to act.

“Risurisu, Lichtenberger, and Amelia will take a carriage,” he said. “The rest of us will go by horse. There’ll be a headquarters at the factory, so find the commander there to get your orders.”

How respectable of Captain Ludtink to give orders for Amelia too. She seemed to be thinking of him as a friend lately, which was why she got upset whenever he left her out.

“That’s all.”

With that, the captain ended our meeting.

“Understood.”

“Roger.”

“Kreh!”

We would be bringing our own food supply. I packed biscuits, jerky, and dried fruit, as I probably wouldn’t have time to cook any meals. I stuffed leather pouches full of the supplies and distributed them to everyone. Once we were prepared, we went out to the training plaza and lined up.

“All units, commence mission!”

At Vice Captain Velrey’s order, we all took off in our respective directions.

Charlotte came outside the barracks to see us off.

“Bye-bye Mell, Liselotte, Amelia!”

“Kreh kreh!”

“We’ll see you again soon,” Liselotte said.

“Please take care of the base for us, Charlotte,” I smiled.

“I can do it!”

Liselotte, Amelia, and I rushed to the carriage area of headquarters. All logistical support members were leaving together.

We were given a covered wagon—a simple wagon with a roof over the top. Though the Order probably chose it to transport a large amount of knights, it really just looked like a wagon for transporting criminals. There were no chairs, of course, so we sat on the ground while we waited for our turn to board.

“It’s like something you use to haul bandits away once they’re under arrest.” Liselotte expressed her honest thoughts, increasing the look of despair on the

boarding knights' faces.

But this was no time to be absentminded. The three of us boarded the wagon too. The interior was bigger than I expected. It looked like it could take about twenty people. I sat near the frame and told Liselotte to sit on the outer side. I got Amelia to sit as close to me as she could.

Once the wagon was full, it started to move out.

We appeared to be the only two female knights dispatched by wagon. I felt the occasional glance come my way, but Amelia always let out a menacing "Kreh!" which diverted attention from me.

The wind blew at me, as there was no door to separate us from the outside. The icy breeze swept through the carriage, chilling the air. I was cold, but Liselotte, Amelia, and I snuggled up to share our warmth.

We arrived at the gelatin factory after an hour or so.

The factory itself wasn't very large. It was about the size of a town square—the kind with a fountain in the middle. The long brick building was supposedly where the workers made the gelatin.

There was a commotion at the site of the incident.

"Hey, give me a hand here!"

I heard a voice calling out to me right away.

I was shown to a field hospital where a knight had slime wrapped around his feet. The clear gel coiled around the young knight's feet, squirming and wriggling.

"Eww... It's so gross...!" Liselotte voiced the exact thing I was thinking.

As we stood there, bewildered, a nearby knight from another squadron yelled at us. "We have to hurry, or it'll digest him! Cut the slime off with a knife!"

Liselotte, Amelia, and I were handed buckets. He quickly cut the slime off the young knight's feet.

"Ngh!"

"Just hang on a little longer!"

It appeared that cutting a slime away from your body was a painful experience. Liselotte was starting to turn pale beside me.

Once a slime swallowed its target, it immediately tried to integrate that prey into its own body. This was what made them so frightening.

The medic knight cut the slime away, and once it flopped to the ground, he threw it straight into our buckets—it splattered into Liselotte’s first. “Gross” was the only word I could find to describe how it looked, wriggling around in there.

My bucket was the next to be filled with slime.

“You there, Medic! Run to that pot!!”

“R-Right!!”

I broke out into a sprint with my slime-filled bucket.

There was a giant pot in the center of the field hospital filled with boiling water. I tossed the slime into the pot. Slimes didn’t die even when torn apart. Heat was their one and only weakness. The slime met its end inside the boiling water. An old man, who looked to be a factory worker, scooped the slime back out with a giant webbed spoon.

“Yeah, we can still sell this,” he assessed.

They were going to ship the slime who almost devoured a knight out to market. What a disturbing thought.

“But don’t you think you’d grow stronger if you ate gelatin that had consumed a whole knight?” The old man stuck out his thumb, seeking my agreement. “We could call it ‘knight slime’! It’d definitely be a huge hit! What do you think?”

Um, well, what I think is that I have no way to answer that.



WE started to see more and more knights absorbed by slimes being brought back to the base. Each time, we cut the slime off, boiled it in water, and repeated the process for the next knight. Even Amelia helped out by carrying empty buckets to us. However, I couldn’t help but worry how my squadron was

doing in their mission to recover the slimes.

Well, knowing them, there was no way they would be defeated.

Lunchtime came and the factory provided our food. The meal consisted of warm soup, bread, and candied fruit. It looked to be a cloudy soup with noodles, beans, and boar-pig meat, as far as I could tell. The bread was the kind that had been roasted until it was nice and crispy. I wasn't sure what the candied fruits were, but they were light pink and smelled sweet and sour.

I started by trying the soup with a sticky texture. I blew on my spoon, then took a bite. It was a light broth with a spicy flavor. The noodles were jiggly like jelly, so I could tell they weren't made of wheat. I liked how they felt when they slid down my throat. The warm soup permeated my chilled body.

Then I spread some candied fruit on top of the bread and bit into it. A strong sour flavor with a hint of sweetness filled my mouth. I enjoyed the grainy, seed-like texture, though I still had no idea what fruits these were.

Liselotte ate her lunch too, though her face was scrunched up in doubt.

Once I finished eating, I went to return my dishes.

"Did you like it?"

That question came from the old man who had the idea to sell the slime that latched onto that knight. He was stirring the giant pot.

"Yes, it was delicious. What was that strange meal made of?" I asked.

"They're prototypes our company's working on."

A bad feeling overcame me. Beside me, Liselotte shouted "I knew it!" as well.

"Ta-dah! Slime noodles!!"

"EEEEEEK!" I let out a scream.

"This here is candied slime!"

"Nooooo! Don't say any more!"

The old man showed us a package labeled "prototype" with art of a slime with eyes and a mouth drawn on it. Liselotte screamed too. Amelia just cocked her head, not having eaten any of the slime herself.



HOW to make an artificial slime:

First, procure water from a lake that's protected by the spirits of the deceased.

Second, mix the base of the slime—a magic stone (*Exact components are a company secret)—with the water and let it sit for a few days.

Third, once it turns to a gelatinous state, cut it into fist-sized pieces and store it inside a magic jar (*Patented product).

Fourth, let the slime ferment for about a week within a magic circle, and then the artificial slime is complete.

“So artificial slimes are sealed away in magic jars and won't run wild unless someone unseals them.”

“How do you process them?”

“We boil the whole jar, so they die inside them.”

“I see.”

I was asking the old man who made the artificial slime noodles about the process. It was very interesting, but I also saw how frightening this cycle could become if abused. It seemed that the Magic Research Bureau and Monster Research Bureau were shady organizations indeed.

Knowing that, it made me feel like Lord Lichtenberger's Royal Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau was a relatively sound organization. Their motivation, after all, was their love of mythical beasts. Although, that love tended to get out of hand sometimes.

As for the process of making gelatin:

First, the artificial slime is boiled in a large pot, still sealed inside its magic jar.

Second, the slime is grilled on a steel plate using magic stones as fuel.

Third, the crispy slime is left to dry in the sun.

Finally, it's cut into pieces that make it easier to process, then packed into bags.

“That’s the gelatin for you.”

“Is that what’s drying up on the roof?”

“Sure is. We leave it there for about a week.”

“I see.”

The magic jars with slime inside were fixed in place when left to sit out. He also explained that there was no chance of the building swaying or collapsing. The entrance into the storage room was also sealed with a spell. Only managers could go in or out.

“Well, the culprit had to be Superintendent Lait,” he sighed.

“Who’s that?” I asked.

“Alexander Lait. He’s a magician from the Magic Research Bureau. But he’s missing right now, so he’s on the wanted list.”

“Oh my. That’s not good.”

So it sounded like this incident’s main suspect was both the manager of the factory and a member of the Magic Research Bureau. I also learned that he was a person with an abnormal love for slimes.

“He gave names to all the slimes we used as materials. I just knew he was gonna try something someday...”

“How unsettling.”

“Ugh! He sounds weird!” Liselotte had been listening to our conversation. She was totally creeped out.

Though this sounded like an incident that would take place at the Royal Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau if you replaced the slimes with a mythical beast, I decided it was best not to point that out.

“Ah, that reminds me. About these slime noodles and candied slime...” He explained that he had made them on his own as new attempts at food products. “The slime noodles are made by kneading boiled slime into wheat flour, while the candied slime is made by stewing our artificial slime with fruit juice and sugar. There are also chia seeds mixed in to give it a different texture.

How'd you like it?"

Well, I *did* like the grainy texture. The flavors were sweet and sour, which I also enjoyed. The man told me that he came up with the mixture of fruit juices himself. Even the noodles were smoother than wheat noodles, which made them easier to eat.

"It feels like the slime aspect is being pushed too hard. When I found out what the ingredients were, I really didn't know what to think," I confessed.

"Then we should call it 'slime-style' and sell it with that label!" he concluded based on my assessment.

"No, that's not it! That still only makes you think about slimes!" I cried.

Well, he was free to do what he wanted with his products. Although, who knew if, after this incident, he would ever get permission from his superiors. The likely suspect, the factory superintendent, was missing, while the ingredients themselves had escaped. There was no telling how this might end.

I said goodbye to the worker, wrote some updates about the case in my notebook, and received orders from the superintendent search party leader to go search inside the factory. He dragged...no, showed me to the front of the factory, and told me to start doing rounds inside.

"I can't stand this! It's scary!" I whined

"We'll be all right. There aren't any slimes left inside now."

"I know that..." I stroked Amelia to calm myself down.

"Kreh!" Amelia told me that I could do it.

"Yes, that's right. I'll do my best."

I needed a griffin to cheer me on. How pathetic. I wasn't living up to my status as a knight.

"Don't worry, Mell. I'll protect you." Liselotte spoke with a stern expression as she held up her golden staff. I knew I could rely on her.

"Kreh kreh!" Amelia said she would protect me too. I was so happy, I felt like I might cry.

“Let’s get going.”

“Right.”

Torches powered by magic stones illuminated the inside of the factory.

Magic stone inventions by the Magic Research Bureau had greatly improved the lives of the people in the royal capital in recent times. Within a few years, they would probably be adapted by other areas too.

“Inventions in magic culture are wonderful, but I wouldn’t want anything like this case to happen in the bureau.”

“Agreed.”

The factory was a long building with rows of cauldrons for boiling slimes. These were also used for sanitizing magic jars, but not for boiling the jars once they had slimes inside. The interior was devoid of people, and the total silence inside was actually pretty creepy.

Clack, clack. Only our footsteps echoed inside the vast factory.

“Liselotte...do you feel like something here isn’t— EEK!”

“What’s wrong, Mell?!”

“Th-There’s something— AH!”

Something cold dripped onto my neck. It was gooey and slid across my skin.

“I-It’s slime... Liselotte, please get it off me!”

“Huh? What? Slime fell on you?”

“Y-Yes! A-A small one...it went under my clothes!”

The tiny slime landed on my neck, then crawled to my shoulder and into my shirt.

“What? Where is it?” Liselotte stuck her hands under the back of my shirt.

“Ah! Your hands are cold!” I cried.

“I’m sorry!”

That startled me. I never knew she had a naturally lower body temperature. But that didn’t matter right now.

“Hey! Ah! Eeeeeek!”

But the slime that dropped on me continued to crawl freely around my back.

The tiny slime was about the circumference of the space between my pinky and index finger when I touched them together. It slithered down my back, then made its way around to my stomach.

“Hyah! Ahahahaha! L-Liselotte, my stomach! It moved! Aha, ahahaha! It tickles...!”

“Now it’s on the other side?!”

Liselotte yanked my top up and we finally laid eyes on the slime.



The orange slime shuddered and dropped off of me. Then it jumped high in the air, trying to escape.

“Kreh!!”

Amelia chased after it by leaping forward and grabbing it in her beak. Then she quickly spit it out and stomped on it with her foot.

“Kreeeeeee!!”

Amelia was stomping on it as hard as she could, but the tiny slime refused to die. These things were formidable foes.

“Move your foot, Amelia. I’ll burn that thing to a crisp!”

“You can’t, Liselotte. There’s a ban on fire inside the factory.”

“Is this really the time to mind such rules?”

But if we break any equipment in the factory, the repair fees are going to kill us... Then I remembered that Liselotte’s family was incredibly wealthy, so perhaps it didn’t really matter.

“But there are lots of magic stones inside the factory,” I pointed out. “It’s full of magic circles too. I may not know much about magic, but if one of them caught fire, I *do* know our lives would be in danger.”

“...Yes, that’s true. I was being thoughtless.”

Liselotte pulled her staff back, knowing that she couldn’t shoot a fire spell. I was glad to see she’d calmed down. She was the type to forget the bigger picture when she lost her cool. I needed to be careful of that.

“Kreh! Kreh!”

“This guy’s really stubborn,” said Amelia, who was still brawling with the tiny slime. I considered going outside to get some hot water, but Amelia’s leg was shaking as she kept the slime pinned, so I realized she must be just about at her limit.

“I know, Amelia. Sorry about this.”

I looked around to see if there was anything I could use to hold the slime down instead. That was when I spotted the magic jars used to seal slimes away.

I quickly grabbed one and unscrewed the top.

“Liselotte, stab the tiny slime with your staff and get it into this magic jar,” I instructed.

“V-Very well.”

We only had one shot at this. As soon as Amelia moved her foot, Liselotte was going to stab the slime and sweep it into the magic jar I was holding.

“All right. Let’s do this!”

“Kreh!”

“Roger!”

We synchronized our breathing...and then it was time.

Amelia raised her foot. Liselotte sent the end of her staff straight into the slime’s body, then pushed it forward into the jar. The trembling tiny slime filled the magic jar.

I quickly moved the lid over the opening. A faint circle lit up over the top of the lid. I knew it had to be some sort of magic circle that sealed the jar.

We’d done it. The tiny slime was captured.

But just as we breathed a sigh of relief, a suspicious person appeared inside the factory.

He was shouting something as he came our way. “Sly! Where are you, my little Sly guy?”

He was a man in his forties wearing a white coat, wandering around aimlessly. But he didn’t look our way at all. He was searching for something. I had a bad feeling about him.

As soon as I laid eyes on the suspicious man, three options appeared in my mind.

One: Hit him.

Two: Hit him.

Three: *Hit him.*

There was no way we'd be able to talk things out. Considering he was roaming the factory without even noticing us, calling a slime "Sly," I highly doubted the man was of sound mind. The man could be none other than this factory's superintendent and member of the Monster Research Bureau—Alexander Lait. I was sure of it.

"What should we do, Liselotte?" I whispered.

"Should I whack him with my staff until he's unconscious?"

Liselotte and I had reached the same conclusion.

But I didn't have a weapon of my own. Maybe the slime in the magic jar would work. The problem was determining how much force to use. I supposed all I needed to do was avoid killing him.

Liselotte and I exchanged glances. Just as we were about to rush into battle—

"Kreh kreh!"

"Get a hold of yourselves!" Amelia demanded.

"Kreh kreh kreh!"

"If this becomes a fight, you'll be filling out paperwork until you drop dead of exhaustion," she reminded us next.

She was right. We always had to do paperwork after missions, but the slightest instance of violence, regardless of whether or not it was justified, needed to be reported in formal documents and submitted to superiors.

Captain Ludtink and Vice Captain Velrey had to write them each time. They always groaned as they filled out the paperwork.

"What should we do...?"

I wanted to resolve things as peacefully as possible...but that was when Superintendent Lait realized we were there. I immediately hid the tiny slime in the jar behind my back.

"Oh! Who are you?" he asked.

I hesitated, unsure of how to respond. His mental condition made me think that we shouldn't introduce ourselves as knights.

Superintendent Lait had graying hair, facial stubble, foggy glasses, and a shabby white coat. He reminded me of the kind of scientists that knights often crossed paths with—those who were passionate about research, but didn't put any thought into their looks.

But this was the man who released the artificial slimes into the wild. His motives were unknown too. I knew he had to be dangerous. I decided not to identify ourselves as knights.

"We're just townsfolk passing through," I said.

"Ah, here to study the factory? Sorry that it's not in operation. But this place is going to be closed down soon."

"Why is that?"

"Because I released all the slimes."

So this man really *was* Alexander Lait. Releasing slimes created to be food into the wild was a serious offense. I didn't understand why he would do such a thing.

"You seem confused," he continued. "You see, I once loved slimes so much that I wanted to eat them. That was why I decided to start researching the process of turning artificial slimes into food. But then one day, it hit me. This wasn't true love at all."

He loved slimes so much that he wanted to *eat* them. I couldn't comprehend such a desire at all.

Superintendent Lait's eyes moved down to Amelia. "Is that a griffin you have there? If Lichtenberger, the freakish leader of the Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau, saw this creature, he'd be jumping for joy."

It was confusing to hear a slime-loving freak call someone else a freak. Freaks shouldn't even be judging others in the first place, or else they'll lump everyone else in with them.

One person in our group was enraged by the slime freak's remarks. Liselotte, of course. Lord Lichtenberger, her father, had just been called a freak.

"Okay, I'm going to burn him up!!"

“C-Calm down, Liselotte! He’s the true freak! Besides, you can’t light fires in here!”

“Then I’m going to take my staff and hit him until those glasses crack!”

“K-Kreh!”

“Inflicting property damage will only result in a lot more paperwork!” Amelia warned her.

She never said it out loud, but I knew Liselotte must really love her father. She clearly couldn’t stand to hear him insulted. Our desperate pleas seemed to have reached her. Liselotte managed to contain her rage.

“But where did my little Sly get to? I’m sick of playing hide and seek.”

The slime freak was probably searching for the tiny slime in my hands. That was when a great strategy came to my mind. I pulled Liselotte and Amelia close to me and whispered my plan to them.

“That’s a good idea.”

“Kreh!”

With their agreement, we launched into action right away.

“Excuse me, slime fre— I mean, Superintendent Lait.”

“...Oh, did I already introduce myself?”

“I’m sorry that I didn’t say this sooner...” This was the point that I reached into my sleeve and pulled out the bracelet that showed I was a knight. “I’m Mell Risurisu, a third-grade combat medic with the Enoch Second Expeditionary Squadron.”

“And I’m Liselotte Lichtenberger, a first-grade sorcerer from the same unit.”

Superintendent Lait’s eyes went wide.

We’d been wearing the designated jackets of the royal order, so it wouldn’t have been surprising for him to identify us based on our appearances alone. I suspected he might be panicking now that he’d heard Liselotte’s family name.

“If you’re knights, then you must be here to arrest me.”

“Correct. So you understand that you’ve done something wrong?”

“I suppose.”

That much was good. He knew the difference between right and wrong.

“Why did you do what you did?” I asked.

“I felt bad for those slimes packed into jars, so I just couldn’t help myself...”

I really felt like asking him what the heck he was talking about.

“That’s why I thought I should bring them all out into the depths of the forest so we could live together, but then everyone got separated...”

“...Of course they did.”

Though he called them food slimes, once they were out of the magic jars, they were no different from normal slimes. They attacked people out of the desire to consume their magical energy.

“Will you come with us, Superintendent Lait?” I asked.

“What do you mean by that request?”

“We’re going to have you live in a dimly lit room, eating cold, watery soup and hard pieces of bread.”

I could speak about these foods because I’d experienced them myself. I told him he’d be able to eat it better once he got used to it. I was praying that he would let us arrest him without any trouble, but the superintendent shook his head.

“I haven’t found my precious Sly yet. I can’t leave this place until we’re reunited.”

I couldn’t help but click my tongue at that. It was time to reveal my trump card.

“Sly is right here.” I revealed the magic jar containing the tiny slime I’d been hiding behind my back.

“S-Slyyyy!!”

So, I was right. This really *was* Sly. I held the tiny slime—Sly—up to the tip of

Amelia's beak. Sly trembled inside the jar.

"If you make any wrong moves, this incredibly powerful griffin will pierce Sly with her beak."

"SLYYYYY!!"

Understanding my plot, Amelia glared fiercely at the jar, spread her wings, and growled "KREEEEH!" in a deep voice. Superintendent Lait began to quiver at my threats.

"Slowly move to the floor and get on your hands and knees."

"Very...well..." Superintendent Lait agreed to obey.

Liselotte tied him up with rope. With his wrists bound together, he was ours to control.

"Take quick steps."

"Ngh..."

We took the surprisingly obedient Superintendent Lait outside of the factory. Liselotte kept a fireball ready at the tip of her staff to be sure he didn't try anything he shouldn't. She stuck it into the superintendent's side menacingly.

"Ah! That's hot! You're going to burn me!" he whined.

"Just keep walking!"

Never in my life had I ever escorted a prisoner. It wasn't something I hoped to experience again. I ended up handing over custody of Superintendent Lait to the captain of the Seventh Expeditionary Squadron, who was managing the scene. I answered honestly when the captain asked me my unit and rank. I also handed over the captured Sly as evidence.

The sun had begun to set while we were busy inside the factory. When I looked toward the forest, I spotted the familiar faces of my squadmates.

"Ah, they're all back."

"Looks like it."

"Kreh!"

Captain Ludtink was holding Garr's spear for some reason. The sharp end was stuck firmly into...a very large slime.

The second squadron must have been battling the giant slime. They were all covered in mud. I could tell what a brutal fight it had been. The captain carried the spear and slime around like they weighed nothing. He was bringing it toward the giant pot.

"Time to meet your maker, damned beast!" With the face of a vicious bandit, Captain Ludtink tossed the slime into the pot.

The slime bubbled as it turned into part of the stew. Captain Ludtink kept poking it back down into the water with the spear so that it couldn't escape the pot.

"Stubborn little bugger!"

He stabbed the slime with a face of pure evil—not how you would expect a knight to look at all. A few minutes later, the creature was motionless. It was probably dead.

"Phew. How annoying."

Despite the fact that he was performing his duty as a knight, for some reason, Captain Ludtink's expression and actions really made him look more like a villain.

A factory researcher, who was in charge of recording the weights of each slime, announced that every last slime had now been killed.

I decided to inform Captain Ludtink of what had happened while we were acting separately.

"Good work today, Captain Ludtink."

"Same to you."

"We just took the suspect into custody."

"Who? *You* did?"

"Liselotte and I did."

I reported how the tiny slime fell on me and I captured it in a magic jar. Then

we ran into Alexander Lait, the wandering, slime-loving freak. Finally, we used the tiny slime as a hostage to get the superintendent to submit. Then we arrested him.

“I see. Well done. But something doesn’t sound right about that.”

“What’s that?”

Captain Ludtink pointed at Zara. For some reason, he was the muddiest of all.

“Slimes go after people with magical energy like him. He has the most magical energy of anyone in the unit, so the slimes were really aggressive about going after Zara.”

I see. So that was why Zara was so covered in mud. Slimes were stubborn about attaching to magical energy.

“So then, why would a slime target you, Risurisu?”

Urk! So that’s what he’s on about?

He wasn’t wrong. The slime didn’t drop on Liselotte, a sorcerer, but me. That part sounded suspicious. I’d asked Zara to keep my magical energy a secret, and I never told the captain about it either.

This muscle-head... No, he may be a bandit, but he’s clever.

As I stood there and started to sweat, Zara came to my rescue.

“Captain, she said the slime dropped down from above, right? I’ll bet it was an accident.”

“Ah, I see. That’s a possibility. Especially if Superintendent Lait was chasing it.”

That seemed to appease him. I relaxed a little.

“They didn’t hurt you, did they, Melly?”

“I’m fine. I’m not injured or anything.”

Superintendent Lait was a strange person, but he was courteous enough to us. He was probably considered a gentleman among freaks.

Zara turned to Liselotte to talk to her next. “Are you okay too, Liselotte?”

“Yes, it went perfectly fine.”

“Did it? That’s wonderful.” Zara smiled at her.

These two were very cold to each other at first, but I could tell they’d bonded since then. That was a big relief.

Our mission was officially over.

All of the participating knights gathered in one place to receive words of appreciation from the overseeing captain of all the expeditionary squadrons. He even announced that the second squadron would be awarded for our distinguished service in capturing the suspect and bringing back the giant slime. I eagerly wondered if that would come with a monetary reward too.

I really wanted a bed big enough to share with Amelia when I moved. I also wanted to send my family some sweets, and if a bit of indulgence was allowed, then I wanted a cute ribbon too. My dream items just kept coming to mind.

The captain ended his closing words there. I was ready to go home...until the old man who’d made the slime meal stepped forward.

“I’ve prepared nourishment for you all after your hard work! There’s enough for everyone, so please enjoy a meal before you leave!!”

The meal he made for us was noodles with slime sauce.

Didn’t I tell you to quit it with the slime-centered recipes?

I wasn’t the only one who was grossed out. Almost every other knight who’d been destroying slimes took one look at the old man’s food and started to turn pale.

Curious about his reaction, I turned to look at Captain Ludtink.

“Well, he made it for us, so let’s eat and then head home.”

Of course a high-class bandit would have a stomach of steel. He spent the full day battling slimes, yet his will remained as strong as ever.

I wanted to learn from his example. I really did, but...

“Huh?! This is the same slime we killed?!”

He apparently didn’t know that the food was made with the exterminated slimes. On top of that, he simply sat in his seat and ate his food quietly, perhaps

not wanting to complain. My own serving of slime noodles arrived next.

“You did a great job today, Miss Medic. I gave you an *extra* big serving.”

“Wow...”

I was less than pleased with an extra-large serving of slime noodles with slime sauce. But I decided I had a duty to eat it too. I said my before-meal prayer and then it was time to dig in.

I wrapped some noodles and sauce around my fork.

“Mmm?!”

The troubling slime noodle bowl was full of vegetables and crisply roasted boar-pig. The sauce paired nicely with the noodles.

“Ah, it’s better than I expected!”

“Isn’t it good? It’s 80 percent slime,” the old man from the factory was eager to inform me.

“Eighty percent...?”

The meal was delicious, but it made me think back on the fights against the slimes, and then I felt sad.

“C’mon, eat up!”

“Oh... Th-Thank you...”

With a distant look in my eyes, I finished every last bite of the slime dinner.

Chapter 4: Cat-Eared Bread Sellers (Must Not Laugh)

AFTER our success in the case of the missing slimes, the Second Expeditionary Squadron was awarded the “One-star Medal of Distinguished Service.” It was an epaulette to be worn on our knight’s uniforms. It consisted of a golden cord with one star attached to it. Our epaulettes were totally plain before this, so the design was far more impressive now.

And most shockingly of all, even Amelia received the same award. Hers was a leather belt with a single silver star embroidered. It functioned like a bangle, and she seemed very happy when I put it on for her.

I later learned that Captain Ludtink had put in the request for her award to his superiors. It was the exact moment I ended up apologizing to the captain for always secretly thinking his scary face made him look like a villain.

As I stared at Captain Ludtink with a look of respect during the morning meeting, he suddenly jolted and began to shuffle the papers around his desk.

“Is something wrong, Captain?”

After Ulgus asked that question, the captain pulled one paper in particular out of the pile. I looked closer, wondering what it could be, and saw the title “Knight-Sponsored Charity Bazaar.” The goal was to bring knights and townsfolk together, with profits being donated entirely to places like orphanages.

I stared at the date in total awe. *Tomorrow?!*

Ulgus seemed to have noticed it too. Timidly, he asked the question on his mind. “Whoa! Captain, don’t tell me...?”

“Yeah. We have to open a booth at this event.”

Awww! They shouldn’t make us do that. But apparently this notification had been sent out eight months earlier.

“It’s not my fault. We got an urgent mission right after the papers came in.”

In other words, once we came back from the expedition, Captain Ludtink

completely forgot.

This bazaar was an annual event, but the assigned units who set up stalls there changed year by year. Now the second squadron's time had come.

"So what's the plan, Captain?" Vice Captain Velrey had a harsh edge to her voice. I heard Captain Ludtink let out an anguished groan.

Zara grabbed the proposal out of the captain's hand. "Oh my. We handmade items to sell, but it also says we have to use the unit's leftover budget."

"What the hell?!" Captain Ludtink blurted. "They didn't do that last year!"

"So even the king's Enoch Royal Knights are strapped for cash."

Captain Ludtink gritted his teeth at the unexpected expense, slamming his hands down on the top of his desk. "Damn!!"

So, the reason the announcement was delivered a whole eight months early was for us to adjust our budget accordingly.

Garr placed the unit's account book on top of Captain Ludtink's desk. As he flipped through the pages, the captain's brow furrowed until it formed deep creases. I speculated that we had no room in the budget for this.

"Our budget's always tight...but why the hell are our repair expenses so high?" he groaned.

Garr listed off the details. The other day, a door broken by Captain Ludtink needed to be repaired. The captain didn't even realize the door was locked when he grabbed the handle, throwing his body weight against the door and destroying the hinges. The door was too warped to use after that. He recoiled, finding himself on the receiving end of cold stares from all his squadmates.

"Uh, well... Sorry about that..."

Zara had a different suggestion—we could bring something to the bazaar that didn't require any material fees.

"What should we bring?"

"Like, we could do a performance with musical instruments?"

In a deep tone, Captain Ludtink practically growled at us, asking if anyone

could play an instrument.

The room fell silent.

I felt like Liselotte was the most likely to be a musician, but unfortunately, it appeared she had no interest in the art.

“What, just me then?”

Shockingly enough, Captain Ludtink himself could play an instrument.

Nope, I can't picture him playing music at all. The sons of noble families supposedly all learned to perform with instruments from a young age. What an elegant hobby.

“Okay, then it sounds like Captain Ludtink will be having a solo concert tomorrow.”

That settled it. We were congratulating ourselves on finding a solution when Captain Ludtink shouted at us.

“No I'm not! I haven't touched an instrument in over ten years. It would be a disaster.”

But if he did his best to perform, kindhearted guests might give us some spare change. The second squadron promised to watch his performance respectfully, but from a distance.

“You lot... You're all so rude...”

We decided we'd bullied Captain Ludtink enough and it was time to get serious.

“As for simple things we could make, there's cookies and such, but I smelled something sweet coming from the women's dorm all morning.”

“Ah, that's right.”

The female knights were probably baking cookies for the bazaar. Between the female knights' cookies and Captain Ludtink's cookies, I would definitely buy the former.

Unable to listen to this any longer, Liselotte made her own proposal. “Why don't we have my family's pâtisserie make something?”

“No, if they look too nice, people will know we cheated,” Captain Ludtink snapped.

“I suppose that’s true.”

It was then that I remembered that I needed to change out our provisions. That led me to an idea of my own, which I decided to suggest.

“Um, what if we took our dried fruits, candied fruits, and smoked meat that’s about to expire soon, then kneaded it into bread?”

They were still perfectly edible, and it wasn’t as if they would taste bad now. They simply didn’t have a very long shelf life.

“Bread, huh...?”

“Exactly. I think it might be a novel thing for townsfolk to buy the foods that knights eat on expeditions.”

“Makes sense. Let’s go with that,” Captain Ludtink approved.

Now that we’d decided to sell food, each member needed to be assigned their own job. Zara, Ulgus, Vice Captain Velrey, and I were going to make the bread. Amelia would be in charge of morale. Garr, Liselotte, and Charlotte would be making the sign for the stall. Captain Ludtink told us he needed to go to a meeting right away.

“Whoa! You’re not gonna help out, Captain? That’s so mean.” Ulgus was criticizing the captain’s choices.

“You’ve got nothing else to do, but I still have work,” he huffed.

“What’s more important? Your job, or the charity bazaar?” Ulgus inquired.

“My job, obviously!”

“Did you hear that?” Ulgus spun around to question us.

“It’s no biggie, Ulgus. The captain has the biggest role of them all.” Zara stroked Ulgus’s head, trying to persuade him.

“Hang on, Zara. What’s this big role of mine?”

“You’re going to be the shopkeeper,” Zara stated.

“What?!”

“Raise your hand if you agree with Captain Ludtink being the shopkeeper,” Zara asked the room.

Every single one of us raised our hands. The unanimous vote meant that we had our new shopkeeper. After that, we needed to decide on a name for our booth. Something suddenly popped into my mind.

“...Maybe something like Bandit Studios.”

“What the hell?!” Captain Ludtink immediately rejected the name. I thought food sold by a bandit would fit the image perfectly...

“What about Griffin Cafe?”

That was Liselotte’s suggestion.

“The Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau would kill us, so no. Rejected!”

“Gosh, Captain. You’re so selfish.”

Liselotte was upset. Captain Ludtink turned to continue the conversation with Ulgus in an attempt to escape her wrath.

“Hey, Ulgus. Got any ideas?”

“Um... Maybe Bandit... Wait, no... Ummm, Bandit...”

“No bandit stuff!” Captain Ludtink roared like a bandit.

It sounded like Ulgus’s head was full of banditry too.

We weren’t going to reach an agreement at this rate. As a last resort, we needed help from the ever-reliable Garr. His tail was wagging back and forth like he had something in mind. Roughly a minute later, Captain Ludtink had agreed to use the name he drew out on paper.

“Expedition Cooking from the Enoch Second Squadron”

“Expedition cooking? That’s perfect!” I exclaimed.

It was a great match for our booth, since we would be selling bread made with the rations we ate on expeditions.

“Captain, don’t you like the name Garr came up with?” I asked.

“It’s better than the rest of them. Let’s use it.”

With that, our booth became “Expedition Cooking from the Enoch Second Squadron” thanks to Garr’s great idea.



WE all went our separate ways and got to work. Zara, Amelia, Ulgus, Vice Captain Velrey, and I were on bread-baking duty. I wanted to get right to cooking...but it looked like everyone else had the same idea. All the kitchen stoves and counters were already in use. Vice Captain Velrey peered into a kitchen from the window, then turned back to the rest of us and shook her head.

“Looks like we got here too late.”

“Yeah...”

Everyone was working on their own products for tomorrow’s charity bazaar. Seeing male knights, both young and old, dressed in aprons and cooking for what was probably one of the first times ever felt like a very rare sight to witness. But this meant the bread-baking team would have to relocate. We decided to head to Captain Ludtink’s house, as he had a large oven we could borrow.

He’d told us that we could go there if all the kitchens were full.

We walked down the street to the captain’s home.

It had been a while since we last visited Captain Ludtink’s house. Despite our sudden arrival, his former wetnurse, Maria, and his gardener, Tony, gave us all the warmest of greetings. There was another servant among them this time—a tall, young man. He told us he’d been recruited at the recommendation of Marina, Captain Ludtink’s fiancée.

Maria beamed at us as she spoke. “Oh my. You have such a cute griffin with you today.”

“Kreh!” Amelia didn’t seem displeased by the praise. I was glad to see she wasn’t frightened.

“Would she like some warm milk?”

“Ah, she only eats fruit, actually.”

“In that case, I have some freshly harvested mandarin oranges.” Maria gave her a mandarin from Captain Ludtink’s garden. Amelia looked very pleased with the gift.

“Do you like it, Amelia?” I asked her.

“Kreh!”

“That’s good to hear.”

I was enjoying the adorable moment...but this wasn’t the time to be distracted.

“Let’s get to baking, everyone!” I announced.

“Would you like me to assist you?”

That surprising offer came from Maria.

“Oh! Thank you, that would be great.”

With that, Zara, Ulgus, Vice Captain Velrey, Maria, and I got to work.

Natural yeast took time to ferment, so we used normal yeast for our bread. We measured the ingredients and kneaded the dough together. In between the first and second fermentation periods, we all chipped in and helped clean the captain’s house.

Once the dough was ready, we spread it out until it was smooth. Then we placed the dried fruits, candied fruits, roasted nuts, and smoked boar-pig meat in each respective loaf before rolling them up like that. Then we sliced up the loaves, lined the slices up on a tray, baked them for about twenty minutes, and they were ready to eat.

Tray after tray came out of the oven, causing a delicious aroma to start filling the house.

“Whoa! It looks so good!” Ulgus’s eyes lit up.

“Seriously! Melly, they turned out so great because of you.”

“Great job, Medic Risurisu.”

I blushed at the consecutive praise from Zara and Vice Captain Velrey.

“No, it’s all thanks to the hard work you guys put in.”

“Hehe! You’re so humble, Miss Mell.”

Even Maria...

“Um, oh, that’s right! We need to see how they taste!” I said.

“Right, just to be safe.” Zara winked at me.

“That’s right. It would be terrible if we messed it all up.”

I started with a piece of candied fruit bread. Ulgus stuffed his mouth full of it. I realized he must be really hungry.

“This is so good, Medic Risurisu! I love how you can taste the crispy forest apple pieces inside!”

“Yeah, I think even young children will like this.”

I’d received the stamp of approval from Ulgus and Vice Captain Velrey.

Next up was the bread with roasted nuts. The dough was fluffy and delicious, but the extreme crunch of the nuts stood out to me in a negative light.

“Hmm... The nuts are a bit hard,” I noted.

“No, it’s fine. It’s a nice jaw workout.”

Through the crunching sound of each bite, Ulgus told me he liked the bread.

Finally, we tried the bread with diced cheese and smoked boar-pig meat.

“This one’s just plain delicious.”

“Absolutely. I can see this one being our best seller.”

Zara approved of the bread too. I was glad we decided to make extra loaves of this kind. Maria also praised the flavor, which was a relief to hear.

These three bread types would be our contribution to this charity bazaar.

Would we manage to sell anything, or would Captain Ludtink’s face scare away our customers? I didn’t know, but I was excited to find out.



WE returned from bread baking to find the others had finished creating a beautiful sign for our booth. That was the job of Garr, Liselotte, and Charlotte. It was a signboard that said “Expedition Cooking from the Enoch Second Squadron” next to a picture of Amelia’s fierce face.

“Wow, it’s so good! You made a great sign,” I praised.

“We did, didn’t we?” Liselotte boasted proudly. It was her idea to include the face of a griffin, since the booth name alone would be too boring. “He sure is big, but he’s good at working with his hands.”

“You’re right about that. Garr helps me do prep work when I cook sometimes.” I knew Garr would be capable of making a wonderful sign.

“Mell! I make Amelia’s beak!”

“Wow, well done, Charlotte.”

Charlotte grinned at my praise. I’d been a bit worried about this group, but it appeared the three of them managed to get along and do the job. Captain Ludtink must have paired them up knowing they would be compatible.

“We colored it too.”

I looked closer and noticed that Liselotte had paint on her hands. She must not have been able to wash it all off. It was so shocking to see paint on the hands of a noblewoman... I only hoped Lord Lichtenberger wouldn’t scold her.

“By the way, Liselotte. You said you were fighting with your father, didn’t you? Where are you living right now?” I asked, concerned.

Liselotte and Lord Lichtenberger were currently in the middle of a big fight about the direction of the Royal Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau. She told me that she had moved because of it.

“I come to work from my family home.”

“What?!”

I never expected her “move” to still be in the same house. I just assumed she left home and moved someplace else.

“I just haven’t spoken with Father since our fight.”

“Oh dear...”

I hoped they would hurry up and reconcile if they were still living together. I suggested that to Liselotte, but she said her father was so busy that he was rarely home. Well, reaching an agreement with the stubborn Lord Lichtenberger was sure to be difficult.

Regardless, our preparations for the charity bazaar were now complete. We had to wear our knight’s uniforms for the job, but we were allowed to wear aprons on top of that.

Actually, I feel like children will be scared if they see Captain Ludtink as our shopkeeper. I wonder if we can dress him in something a little more humorous.

Not that the idea of Captain Ludtink in an apron wasn’t amusing enough to imagine already.



THE day of the charity bazaar arrived. The weather was bright and sunny. Charlotte stayed at the barracks, not wanting to be in such a large crowd.

“Have fun, Mell!”

“I’ll see you later, Charlotte.”

I waved my hand and said goodbye. Then I walked to the venue on foot.

The town square with the fountain, the location of the bazaar, was buzzing with energy as the knights all set up their booths. There had to be about fifty booths in total. It wasn’t a major event, but I liked how homegrown it felt.

We headed to the stand prepared for us and set up a curtain to protect us from the sun. Then we laid out the fabric that Zara brought with him for the table and set up baskets with our bread on top. Then we attached Garr’s special standing sign in front of the booth. Amelia, our salesgirl, was showing her face to the world.

“This all looks pretty nice.”

“Don’t you think? Now the only thorn in our side is Captain Ludtink.”

Zara and I both glanced at the captain. He had his arms crossed, and his brow

furrowed in a scary look like some kind of gatekeeper.

“He’ll probably scare first-time customers away. He looks like a mean old man.”

“That’s all I see too.”

Zara couldn’t overlook this. He went over to the captain to teach him how to act.

“Captain Ludtink, first thing’s first, you should smile to greet customers...” He instructed Captain Ludtink to smile at me, but the “smile” I received was much closer to an evil sneer.

It was a frightening expression, not unlike how a crazed warrior would smile on the battlefield as his face became stained with the blood of his enemies. How was he even doing that? Zara had to put a stop to that horrifying smile.

“No good. Talk about scary! You’re going to make these poor kids cry.”

“Then how am I supposed to smile?”

“Let me show you!” Zara’s angry expression transformed into a gentle smile. “Welcome to our booth,” he demonstrated.

He was perfect. I gave him full marks.

“See? Like this.”

Captain Ludtink tried to smile as instructed. But instead, he looked like a bandit who’d just learned that his evil scheme was a success. I gave him no marks. It was just dreadful.

“It’s no good!”

“I just can’t do it. You can handle the customers.”

“But the captain should be the one doing that!”

He couldn’t smile, couldn’t be friendly with the customers, and didn’t want to do it in the first place. This was all wrong. We’d worked hard to bake delicious bread for this event and everything. I was starting to get sad.

“Kreh kreh...”

Even Amelia, who was motivated to be our salesgirl, let out a sigh too. *“This guy’s no good. He’s the worst person in the world to be selling things,”* she said. I didn’t disagree.

No matter how hard Amelia worked, Captain Ludtink was going to put a damper on sales as our shopkeeper.

“This is bad!” Ulgus, who’d been out observing the other booths, returned to us. It appeared he’d discovered something shocking.

“What is it, Ulgus?”

“W-W-We’re in trouble! The female knights at that booth over there are also selling bread, and...they’re wearing cat ears to attract customers!!”

“They’re *what*?!”

It appeared that the women in the dorm had been baking more than just cookies. They made bread too.

“Wow, what a tremendous foe...”

The beautiful female knights were wearing cat ears and selling bread. Our rival booth was shockingly powerful.

“This won’t do. How are we supposed to compete when Captain Ludtink is terrible with customers?”

“Hey, who said I was terrible with them?”

No one was taking Captain Ludtink’s side in this disagreement. Regardless, I tried to come up with some sort of solution.

“I-I’ve got it!” Ulgus seemed to have come up with something. He clapped his hands and cried out. “Captain Ludtink should wear cat ears too!”

“No one wants that!” I gasped after shouting that. It was something I should have kept inside my mind.

“Risurisu...” he growled.

“Captain, do you think that cat ears will look good on you?”

“.....”

Apparently not.

But we decided that we needed to try it, at the very least. Ulgus told us that we could easily make a pair out of a handkerchief.

“I used to make handkerchief ears as a kid.”

I gave him my flower handkerchief, since only square-shaped cloths would work, apparently.

“First, you fold the handkerchief in on the left and right to make a rectangle. Then turn it over and fold the top and bottom into the middle. Finally, take the ends of the handkerchief and pull them left and right, two at a time. Then they’re ready to go.”

“Whoa...!”

The handkerchief had turned into a perfect pair of cat ears.

Ulgus handed it over to Captain Ludtink and told him to try putting it on his head. The captain silently brought the ears up to his head.



No one could say anything. We all stared at our feet.

This wouldn't do. I had to muster up my courage, raise my hand, and ask for permission to comment.

"Um, may I give my honest impression?"

He gave a quiet nod.

"I'm sorry. You just look like...a pervert wearing women's underwear on his head."

The captain simply lowered the handkerchief from his head. Maybe he felt exactly how he looked to us.

Everyone was silent.

Sorrow overfell us all. Some wanted to run, while some processed the depressing scene they'd just witnessed...until...

"Pffft!" Ulgus burst out laughing, unable to contain it any longer.

"Ulgus, you little rat! You did that on purpose!" Captain Ludtink turned bright red, balled up the handkerchief, and threw it at Ulgus.

Um, but that's my handkerchief... He was very careless with it. But this wasn't the time to be playing around.

"Let's change strategies, since we don't want to walk away with bread that didn't sell." I suggested we narrow down a specific clientele.

"Medic Risurisu is right. It will be hard to sell indiscriminately." Ulgus, with a stiff look on his face, began to explain his strategy. If the male customers were being poached by the female knights, we should poach the female customers instead. "I think Ahto should pair up with Vice Captain Velrey."

A valid suggestion. Zara and Vice Captain Velrey were beautiful people who could pull off handsome male attire. These two would definitely be able to bring a flood of women to our booth.

"Captain Ludtink can be sure we're getting publicity."

It was a simple job, consisting of him walking around with a sign that had our booth name on it, advertising our bread around the venue.

“I’ll go tell Garr to make a sign you can carry around.”

“Yeah, do that.”

Garr and Liselotte were spending the morning on standby at the barracks. They would join us here in the afternoon.

Vice Captain Velrey returned from exchanging money. We told her about the outline of our battle plan. She furrowed her brow, looking unsure.

“...Do you really think I can handle the customers? I’ve never done that before.”

“You’ll be all right. You won’t have any issues if you just be yourself, Vice Captain. Zara will be with you too!” I assured her.

“Is that right? Then I’ll do whatever I can.”

Zara and Vice Captain Velrey immediately moved to stand in front of our booth.

“W-Wow!”

They were such beautiful shopworkers. They looked so approachable too. Our entire booth received a huge upgrade in appeal.

“Kreh kreh!”

Amelia, our adorable and perfect salesgirl, was also fired up to attract customers.

Our victory was all but assured.



FINALLY, the bazaar had begun! Townsfolk swarmed the venue in the town square. As I expected, male customers raced straight to the female knights’ bread booth like bees to honey.

Cat ears were very hard to beat...

However, Zara and Vice Captain Velrey were proving to be effective.

“Hello there, miss. Care for some bread?”

Those words and a smile were all they needed to lure in women every time.

Beautiful people in men's clothes are so powerful...

Ulgus was managing inventory, preparing change, and packing bags with purchases. It certainly kept him busy. Amelia was also crying “Kreh kreh!” to advertise our booth. Our brilliant salesgirl would even cock her head to capture the hearts of the ladies.

The sign Garr made to advertise our booth had the name, a little drawing of bread, and even a side profile picture of Amelia. It didn't look like something made in such a short amount of time. He must have asked Liselotte to draw Amelia.

Captain Ludtink and I were walking around the plaza to draw up publicity for our booth.

“We're selling bread made by the expedition squadron! Expedition bread!”

The stern-faced Captain Ludtink was carrying the sign while I walked at his side, explaining our bread.

“Expedition bread?”

“What's expedition bread?”

Some children stopped next to us. I crouched down next to them to do a bit of advertising.

“We used rations we eat on expedition missions and kneaded them into the bread.”

“Wow.”

“So knights eat it too?”

“If you eat it, you can become strong like this bandit...I mean, this knight too,” I said, pointing at Captain Ludtink.

“Eek!”

“Argh!”

The children paled as soon as they saw the captain, shrieking and running away. It looked like that was a bit too intense for them.

“Captain Ludtink?”

Surely I just imagined how his fingers were trembling. I couldn't think of anything to say to cheer him up, so I just pretended not to notice his mood. On our way, we passed by the cat ear booth.

"We have delicious bread! Would you like to try one?"

"I'll take one, no, three loaves, miss!"

"Me too!"

Their booth was crowded with people. They had simply added cat ears to their knight's uniforms, and yet they garnered so much demand...

"Look at all that."

"Yeah, it's impressive."

"Risurisu, go buy some of their bread," the captain ordered.

"Whaaat...? But it's so crowded."

"Just go already."

"Fine."

I approached the cat ear booth. Ninety percent of their customers were men. I couldn't imagine what kind of bread had everyone so obsessed. Though I understood the feeling of wanting to buy something from beautiful women wearing cat ears.

After a few minutes of waiting in line, it was finally my turn.

"Excuse me, can I have one loaf of bread?"

"Of course. Here you go."

"Thank you."

The cat-eared female knight gave me the bread. I took it out from the bag and found a very normal piece of bread with nothing remarkable whatsoever. It appeared that even plain bread was massively popular when sold by beautiful women with cat ears.

"...And that's what happened!"

Captain Ludtink snorted after hearing my report on the enemy's movements.

“The girl calling out to customers isn’t a knight. She’s a secretary,” he said.

I thought she seemed particularly slender for a knight—now the mystery was solved. All the customers seemed pleased too. It was a picture of serenity.

“Do men really like that sort of thing?” I asked.

“No clue.”

It sounded like Captain Ludtink wasn’t a fan of cat ears. But ears seemed so wildly beloved. It was a startling answer to hear from him.

We spent about thirty minutes walking around. It wasn’t a large plaza, so we didn’t need to advertise for very long. We returned to the second squadron’s booth.

“Hmm?”

“Huh? Is that our ceiling curtain?”

“I-I think so.”

There was a huge crowd around our unit’s booth. The customers were mostly women, but there were some young and middle-aged men in there too.

I looked in at the shop diagonally to see what was going on and instantly figured it out. The customers all had embroidered badges with a dragon surrounded by ivy—the symbol of a certain bureau.

The members of the Royal Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau were here to see Amelia.

“Kreh!”

“S-So cute...!”

“She’s absolutely remarkable...”

The employees all stared at Amelia with pink-tinted cheeks. They seemed as passionate about mythical beasts as ever.

We went around to the back and were shocked to find that we were almost out of bread. Ulgus must have been working hard.

“Wow, just look at this crowd!” I said to him.

“I know. Ahto, Vice Captain Velrey, and Amelia really made things work for us.” He also told me that if the crowd didn’t thin out, we would probably be sold out in less than an hour.

It was a huge relief. I didn’t want to have to live off of unsold, leftover bread.

Garr had even set up a card that said, “Please don’t touch the salesgirl.” It was meant for children, but now it was used as a measure against the Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau employees.

We ended up selling all our bread just over an hour after opening our booth. It came as quite a surprise to me. I never expected the bread would sell so well. But I had no regrets, as we’d used up the last of the ingredients to supply today’s booth.

After selling out our stock, we were supposed to use the booth as a place to distribute pamphlets about the work the royal knights did. They never had enough knights to do this part. I ended up in charge of distributing the pamphlets. Zara, Captain Ludtink, and Vice Captain Velrey returned to the barracks. Liselotte came to replace them.

“Oh my! You really sold everything?” she asked, surprised.

“We did. Zara, Vice Captain Velrey, and Amelia did an incredible job.”

It turned out that, surprisingly, Liselotte wanted to be a salesgirl too. Perhaps she was at the age where she wanted to experiment.

“Have you ever worked as a shopkeeper before, Mell?” she asked me.

“I have. My family runs a general store, and I used to help out a lot.”

“Hmm. So you know what hard labor is like.”

“I wouldn’t say that.”

Still, it felt like a miracle for a girl from a family who ran a general store in the woods to be friends with a marquess’s daughter. Life is truly full of the unexpected.

Ulgus came to deliver us some goods while we were working. It was bread from the female knights at the cat ear booth.

“They even meowed for me!” he gushed.

“Good for you.”

It sounded like Ulgus had gotten some special service from the knights. He seemed very pleased. I had only looked at our rival bread before. This time, I would be eating it.

“Hmm... It just tastes kind of plain,” I noted.

“It’s dry and hard to eat. Your bread is far more delicious, Mell,” Liselotte said.

“I agree. Yours is way better than this, Medic Risurisu.”

“Thank you both.”

So even if the food wasn’t shockingly tasty, the presentation and communication of the product were what drove sales. I learned an important lesson that day.

Ulgus left too, having work of his own to do at the barracks. Liselotte and I needed to work hard to help the Royal Order grow. We had about a hundred pamphlets, but no one seemed particularly interested in them. Maybe we needed to call out to people to get them to stop and look. Liselotte was a beautiful girl, but the glasses seemed to make her look a bit scary. Men only glanced at her before continuing on their way.

“Hmmm...”

We needed to convey the appeal of the Royal Order in a short, simple way. Maybe I could tell people that you get three delicious meals a day for free in the cafeteria?

I took a deep breath...

“Hello there, ladies.”

Then I let the breath back out instead of speaking. A gentleman had approached our booth to talk to us. He looked to be in his fifties, with gray hair smoothed back, a monocle, and a formal outfit. He held a cane in his hand too. I doubted a man of this appearance would be interested in becoming a knight.

“Um, is there something we can help you with?”

“It’s nice to meet you. I’m the director of the Magic Research Bureau, Vario Leffra.”

The director of the Magic Research Bureau?! I stared at the unexpectedly important guest.

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

He reached his hand out toward me, but...

“KREEEEH!!”

Amelia put her front legs on the tabletop and snapped at the man.

“No, Amelia!”

“Oh dear.”

Amelia froze at the same time the director pulled his hand back.

“Yes, that’s a mythical beast, all right. They’re very possessive, aren’t they?”

“I don’t think it’s possessiveness. I think it’s because you had a creepy smile on your face when you greeted her.” Liselotte made no attempt to hold her thoughts back toward the director. She was truly fearless.

“Oh, how rude... You there must be a sorcerer, aren’t you, miss? You have a very lovely staff. May I ask your name?”

“I’m Liselotte Lichtenberger.” She pointed her staff at him and boldly announced her name.

“Ah, you must be Lord Lichtenberger’s daughter. Now I see why you have such guts.”

When he extended his hand to her, Liselotte grabbed it firmly, as if accepting a challenge.

“Wow... What wonderful magical energy!” The Magic Research Bureau director looked at his hand, taken aback. He was wearing a crystal ring on his finger that could measure magical energy levels. It was probably the same crystal that Zara had at his house.

It was glowing blue in response to Liselotte’s energy.

That was close. If I'd touched his hand, the director would have found out about my level of magical energy. Amelia must have stopped him for that reason. I was almost in some serious trouble.

"Lady Liselotte, may I speak with you for a moment?" he asked her.

"Absolutely not!"

"It won't take long at all." The director refused to let go of Liselotte's hand. "I see. What a wonderful energy quality...!"

"Hey, let me go!"

It appeared that this man had nothing but magical energy going on in his brain. Calling him an energy freak didn't seem inappropriate.

But how should I handle this situation? Three options crossed my mind.

One: Hit him.

Two: Hit him.

Three: *Hit him.*

I rolled up a brochure and tip-toed quietly toward the director of the Magic Research Bureau. As soon as I raised my hand, someone else arrived to grab the director's hand first.

"Hey! Wh-Who are you?!"

The middle-aged man who got between the two of them was wearing a hat, black reflective glasses, and ceremonial clothes. The man, without a single word, dragged the director away from Liselotte. The only thing I caught a glimpse of were his eyes—the same color as Liselotte's. They were the familiar eyes of a nobleman.

As quickly as he arrived, that man had disappeared again with the director in tow.

"Are you all right, Liselotte?"

Now that the magic freak was gone, peace was restored at our booth. Still, I couldn't believe how far he went with a total stranger just because he liked her magical energy.

Liselotte murmured something under her breath, “That man who showed up was very kind to help.”

She meant the gallant older man who appeared with the dark glasses. I didn’t want to feel this way, but he impressed me a bit too.

“I wonder who he was? I want to thank him,” she said.

I’m not certain, but I’m pretty sure he was your father.

The marquess was surely watching over Liselotte from the shadows out of concern. He probably didn’t feel like he could act openly because the two were in the middle of a fight. It was hard to decide if I should tell her the truth or not.



I realized it might be difficult to keep my magical energy a secret forever. Even I felt the potential danger lurking in this situation.

As soon as we returned from the charity bazaar, I asked Zara if he would go to dinner with me, because I had something I needed to talk about.

“Can we go to that place I recommended, Melly?”

“Sure.”

“Then let’s go home first, then meet in front of the restaurant later.”

“Sounds good.”

After work, I went home to change, then headed to the restaurant Zara recommended—Avan Atulaford.

Children called out to Amelia and me as we strolled down the street. They appeared to be about six or seven years old, looking at us with sparkling eyes.

“Wow, a knight’s griffin!”

“They must be really strong!”

This was probably thanks to Liselotte’s work in propagating the word about mythical beasts. Amelia also drew the attention of children after the director of the Magic Research Bureau left earlier.

Our strategy had worked. We managed to distribute about half of our

hundred brochures.

The boys crowded around Amelia curiously.

“Miss Knight, can we touch the griffin?”

“Will she bite?”

Ummm... I'm not sure about that.

I felt like she'd become much calmer since we formed our contract. She was capable of being apart from me now and didn't cry at night either. However, when Ulgus was acting like he wanted to pet her, she always instantly turned sour toward him.

Amelia was at a difficult age. But I decided to ask her anyway.

“Amelia, can these kids pet you?”

“Kreh!”

“*It's fine,*” she replied, surprisingly enough. She moved to the side of the road so as not to be in the way, then sat down. Amelia's round eyes were very cute, but her body was bigger now, which came with a sense of majesty she gave off. But the children didn't seem frightened.

“Please be gentle with her,” I told them.

“Yay!”

“Thank you!”

The children gleefully stroked Amelia's fur. I crouched down next to them to chat a little bit. “Mythical beasts are gentle creatures, but they tend to be on edge around people. So if you see one in the forest, be sure to stay away from it, no matter what.”

“Okay!”

“Understood!”

I wasn't an employee of the Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau, but I didn't want them to get the wrong idea about the creatures, so I thought it was something they should know.

The darkness of night cast sunlight away, past the horizon.

I told the children they should go home before it got too dark, which they obeyed. I thanked Amelia. She generously told me not to worry about it.

“By the way, why won’t you let Ulgus touch you?”

“Kreeeh!”

“Ah, I see.”

That explained it. She didn’t want young men to touch her. Perhaps she had the heart of a fair maiden. Well, if someone asked me if Ulgus was allowed to touch me, I would completely reject the idea too.



I arrived at Avan Atulaford right on time.

Zara was waiting outside the entrance. He wore a masculine green shirt with ivy patterns over the stand-up collar and a pair of black slacks, and he was currently being swarmed by a group of women. His eyebrows were turned down like he was upset about this development.

“Kreh kreh.”

“What?!”

Amelia told me that the women were asking him to go out with them.

“Wow, the capital city is amazing. The women just go right up to the men like that...” I commented.

“Kreh kreh.”

She explained that the women in the city were like hunters. When they spotted someone of the opposite sex, they went after them with everything they had. It was their natural behavior.

“Wow. I see... Wait, Amelia, where did you learn about all this?”

“Kreh!”

She explained that mythical beasts are simply born with an abundance of knowledge. Liselotte wasn’t there to explain their ecology, so I simply had to

take Amelia at her word.

“Melly!”

Zara ran over to me when he spotted us. He told the women that his companion was here, smiling and waving farewell. All the women behind him glared at me. *The capital city hunters are really scary!*

“Let’s go inside. It’s chilly out here,” he said.

“Sure.”

We left the women outside and went in through the rear entrance.

This restaurant was a familiar place to me now. When we took our seats at the table, we were given a special menu of seafood recommendations. I decided to order the white fish meal. Zara ordered the daily special. Amelia ordered assorted fruit and water.

“Sorry about that fuss. I’d never even met them before, but they wanted to go drinking with me.”

“I’m sure that was no fun.”

Now I understood why Zara was always crossdressing. I was getting the sense that women liked him so much, they went as far as to interfere in his daily life.

“Just recently, I feel like I would have been able to handle them without any hassle. But I just can’t seem to put up the act these days.”

“But I think that’s perfectly normal.”

My words seemed to spark a realization in Zara. I thought back to what Vice Captain Velrey told me about him. Zara had once been forcing himself to act like the “cheerful and flashy man” that everyone wanted him to be. I had a hunch that he’d been able to regain his true self after joining the second squadron.

“I’m a bit shy too, so I understand how you feel.”

“Thanks, Melly.”

It was a relief to see his smile had returned. I felt myself smile too.

“You see, Melly... I really—”

Just as Zara started to speak, our food arrived at the table.

“Wow, it all looks so good!” I exclaimed.

I was served a bowl of white fish soup, cream cheese pie, and a seasonal salad. We even had all the bread we could eat. It was a very gluttonous meal. I was leaning over the table to look at the food closer, but the waitress ended up laughing at me.

“I-I’m sorry.”

“No, I take it as a compliment. Please enjoy your meal while it’s still warm.”

“Thank you very much.”

I pressed my hands together and expressed my gratitude for the meal in prayer.

The soup was made with white fish and water, simmered until the meat became soft and tender. There also looked to be shellfish in the broth, which only further concentrated the seafood umami flavors of the soup. I looked forward to warming my cold body with such a flavorful meal.

When I looked at Zara, he had his spoon in one hand, but wasn’t trying the soup himself.

“Ah, Zara, you were about to say something, right?”

“We can talk after we eat. We don’t want such a delicious meal to get cold.”

“I’m sorry about that.”

“Don’t let it get to you. Anyway, Melly, how amazing is this pie?”

The cream cheese pie consisted of a flaky crust, cheese-flavored cream sauce, and white fish meat. I stuck my knife in and watched the sauce ooze out onto my plate. The fish itself melted in my mouth, combining with the sauce to send the flavors soaring to an even greater height. The lattice crust gave off the aromatic scent of butter, with the light outer texture combining with the thick sauce underneath for an amusing difference in textures.

Every seafood dish was exquisite. They were the waitress’s recommendations, after all.

Zara's daily special consisted of boar-pig stew and skewers. The boar-pig meat on the skewers was roasted with herbs. I traded some of my cream cheese pie for a skewer. It was delicious, instantly putting me in a blissful mood.

We shifted to the main topic at hand once we finished dinner.

I planned to let Zara go first, but he told me to start.

"You see, I was visited by the director of the Magic Research Department this afternoon."

"What?!" Zara cradled his head in his hands when I explained the crystal ring. "I actually thought I should find someone who can help you with this. I didn't feel like the two of us could handle it ourselves..."

He said that he considered asking Captain Ludtink for help. Having an earl's family on my side might come in handy if I ever got in trouble.

"But the captain's family won't be able to stand up to the director of the Magic Research Bureau."

"Why is that?"

"The director, Vario Leffra, is an official member of the royal family."

"Eeeeeek!"

Zara told me he was five years younger than his older brother, the king. I never would have expected a prince to be strolling around town without any attendants. Unfortunately, Liselotte hadn't made her debut in society yet, so she didn't know who he was.

"So if he wanted to keep an eye on you, you wouldn't be able to escape."

"This is terrible!"

This time, I was the one to cradle my head. Zara said I would need a protector. I agreed.

"Ideally, they have to appreciate mythical beasts, have enough money to support you, and be strong enough to avoid bending to anyone more powerful than them..."

I could think of one such person who fell under those qualifications. Zara and I

both stared up at the ceiling and squinted.

The world could be so cruel. Why did I deserve to be put through such a trial?

“Well, I’ve got one person I can think of.”

“I only know the one too.”

The stubborn man who adored mythical beasts—the director of the Royal Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau and a powerful marquess, Marius Lichtenberger.

It went without saying that this was none other than Liselotte’s father.



IT was a perfectly normal morning. Amelia and I got dressed and headed to the cafeteria. Today’s breakfast was an omelet with minced meat, vegetable soup, salad, boiled eggs, and all-you-can-eat bread. Once I received my meal from the cafeteria lady, I took my seat at a table.

I said my before-meal prayer, opened my eyes, and was greeted with a “Good morning” by the knight across the table from me. I remembered her—she was a lookout at the bath when I needed to be examined for the seal representing my contract with Amelia. She had very defined abs.

The knight’s skin was tanned and her body looked very sturdy. Not even a heavy suit of armor and a sword at her hip could disrupt her balance. It was the ideal physique for a knight.

“It’s been a while. I heard that young lady from the Bureau joined your unit. How have you been getting along?”

“It’s all right. We’ve managed to get by.”

“I’m sure things are tough, but keep doing your best.” She was a very kind knight to cheer me on like that. “See you later then.”

“Goodbye.”

I watched the knight leave with a warm feeling in my heart.

“Kreh kreh!”

“Oops! It’s not the time to space out.”

From her place on the floor, Amelia had warned me that I was going to be late to meet Zara. I picked up my knife and cut into the omelet. The soft-boiled egg oozed out from inside along with sauteed minced meat that was seasoned to be sweet and salty. The egg itself was fluffy and less flavorful, but that was the perfect way to complement the rich meat inside.

It was delicious when eaten on top of a slice of bread too.

But I didn't have time to savor them like this. I only had fifteen minutes before I was supposed to meet Zara. If only I'd woken up a bit earlier. I shoved the breakfast into my mouth and sprinted out to the place where Zara and I were to meet.



SEVEN packages had arrived at the Second Expeditionary Squadron's office that morning. Charlotte did her best to haul them inside.

"Um, Big Sister Anna, this is all of them."

"Thank you, Charlotte."

Charlotte grinned when the vice captain patted her head.

"Weren't they heavy, Charlotte?"

The parcels were definitely large. Some were even taller than Charlotte herself. Her ears perked up. She stuck her chest out boastfully.

"Not heavy. I strong!"

"I see. You really impress me."

"Mell, if something wrong, you can always talk to Charlotte."

"Right. I know I can rely on you."

Charlotte nodded her head before leaving the room.

In the now-silent space, my eyes drifted down to those packages. Vice Captain Velrey also looked at them in confusion.

"Where did these come from, Vice Captain?" I asked.

"They're apparently apology gifts from the directors of the Magic Research

Bureau and Monster Research Bureau. They're for our work on the slime case..."

There was one large box, four long and narrow boxes, one medium-sized box, and one large narrow box.

What could they be?

"The senders make me think we're not going to like what's inside..."

The vice captain smiled awkwardly in response to my words.

That was when the door opened with a loud slam. Captain Ludtink kicked it open to enter the room. Behind him were the people who had been in the breakroom—Garr, Ulgus, Zara, and Liselotte.

The captain tossed me a small box as he passed. *Now what's this?*

He sank into his office chair with a thud and growled that the morning meeting was starting. I kept the mysterious box in my hands as I listened to what he had to say.

"First of all, we're going on an expedition today. We should be able to return tonight if it goes well."

He explained that something called "laughing ivy" was growing in a forest near the royal capital. It had started to attack passers-by like traders, and it was now our job to take it out. I raised my hand and asked a question.

"Pardon me. Are we going by horseback?"

"No, I've prepared a carriage."

"Understood."

I wouldn't be able to take Amelia if we went by horse, but that wouldn't be an issue now. However, Amelia was starting to get to a size that made it difficult to transport her, even in carriages. I wondered if she could run alongside the rest of us on horses. I would have to ask her if she had the strength and stamina for such a thing.

Finally, Captain Ludtink addressed the packages I'd been so curious about. "These are weapons that the Monster and Magic Research Bureaus made

together. They sent them as an apology for the other day.”

Shockingly, the packages were filled with weapons.

I couldn’t help but wonder what they would be like, as joint creations of those two bureaus. Though he didn’t say it out loud, Captain Ludtink had a look on his face that said this whole thing was a real nuisance.

“They say they’re made with monster fangs and claws that contain magical energy. They’re just experimental weapons, so they want us to try them out and see how they feel.”

How were these weapons an apology if we still had to submit reports about them?

Everyone grimaced down at the packages.

“By the way, Captain Ludtink. What’s in this little box?” I asked.

“It’s for Amelia. They sent it right over when I said we were one short.”

“Th-Thank you for that.”

I opened up the box and found a silk handkerchief inside. It appeared to have some sort of spell embroidered in it. What could it be?

Liselotte informed me that it was a spell to bring good fortune.

I showed it to Amelia, and once I knew she liked it, I tied it around her neck.

“Kreeeeh!”

Everyone told Amelia that it looked good on her and that it was very cute. She was most delighted by this praise.

“But this equipment’s gonna be the real problem...”

The captain read out the letter that came with the shipment before opening the weapons. It was an apology and thank-you letter for the recent slime incident. At the very end was a note about the weapons.

“These ultimate weapons, crafted between the Monster Research Bureau and Magic Research Bureau, are named ‘The Seven Deadly Sins.’ They are as follows:

Magic sword: Pride

Dual magic swords: Greed

Magic spear: Wrath

Magic bow: Sloth

Magic ax: Lust

Magic staff: Envy

Magic pole: Gluttony.”

The great sword was entirely black, from blade to scabbard, giving it a menacing look. I felt like it suited Captain Ludtink’s vibe in a way.

The dual swords were entirely white with a gem-studded scabbard. The handles had beautiful flower patterns on them, and the weapons themselves practically doubled Vice Captain Velrey’s natural elegance.

The spear was entirely green with vines carved into it. It made me think of the depths of a forest when I looked at it. It was perfect for the gentle Garr.

Ulgus’s bow was the color of the ocean. This appeared to be a brand new type of bow that the knights weren’t using yet, and I could tell Ulgus was really excited to have it in his hands.

The battle ax was gold from its handle to its blade. The tip had some sort of horn sticking out of it. I knew it would be even more beautiful once it was in Zara’s hands.

The magic staff had a red handle with a round, black gem inlaid at the top. It was a tall, skinny tool about my height. Surely Liselotte would only make it look even more captivating once she wielded it.

Finally, there was my weapon. But it was just a wooden pole. The pole was a bit taller than me, with no decorations and no engraved spell either. It was shockingly plain.

“Th-This is...” I started. Everyone’s eyes were painfully focused on me. “It must be something to help get fruit out of tall trees. I can use it to dry laundry too.”

I was a non-combatant in the first place, so it wasn't like I had a need for weapons. I needed to stay positive.

"Still, there's 'ira' and 'acedia' and stuff. They sure do have strange names." Ulgus murmured his thoughts on the weapons.

"That's an ancient language," I explained. As a member of an elf tribe with a wide breadth of knowledge, I knew a little bit of the ancient language myself.

"Is that right? That makes sense."

My grandmother taught me when I was young, but it appeared that the people of the capital city never engaged with the language.

"So what do the weapon names mean?" the captain asked.

I couldn't exactly tell Captain Ludtink that his weapon was titled "Pride."

"I don't know."

"Liar. You look like you just don't want to say it because it's something weird." Captain Ludtink was sharp. I almost clicked my tongue at him.

Was this the instinct of a bandit? How frightening.

I couldn't be bothered to play dumb, so I explained all the meanings of my squadmates' weapons.

"Captain Ludtink's sword is 'Pride,' Vice Captain Velrey's blades are 'Greed,' Garr's spear is 'Wrath,' Ulgus's bow is 'Sloth,' Zara's ax is 'Lust,' Liselotte's staff is 'Envy,' and my pole is 'Gluttony.'"

Every last member got an uncomfortable look on their face. *I didn't want to say it because I knew you wouldn't like it.*

"They really gave them some tasteless names, didn't they?"

"Agreed."

However, they appeared to function wonderfully as weapons. Captain Ludtink even gave the worrying remark that he "Can't wait to go cut something down."

Vice Captain Velrey worried that the flowers on her swords were too showy.

Don't worry about that. They suit you perfectly.

Garr twirled his spear around to entertain Amelia. He didn't seem particularly concerned about the name of his weapon.

Ulgus was still just overwhelmed to have the latest model of bow to work with. I was happy for him.

Zara, on the other hand, carried his battle ax with a conflicted look on his face.

"...Lust, huh?"

Now that he knew what the name meant, I didn't feel like I could tell him it suited him.

Liselotte didn't pick up her new staff. She wanted to keep using the one she already had.

"My staff means a lot to me. I can't just get a new one like that."

She told me her staff was like an acknowledgment that she'd become an adult.

All of the members had different reactions to their weapons.

I decided to bring my pole with me on the next expedition to see how I could use it.

Chapter 5: Snow Mushroom Soup and an Expedition

VICE Captain Velrey gave us the signal that it was time to begin preparations.

I took out bread, jerky, jars of pickled veggies, and cheese from the food storage. Then I packed them into the usual bags.

“Kreh!”

Amelia brought me a leather bag filled with her share of dried fruit.

“Oh, thanks!”

I added first aid equipment and enough medicinal herb solutions for everyone in the squad. My bag was extremely heavy by the time I finished preparing.

“Amelia, I wouldn’t have to carry medical items if I could use healing magic. Wouldn’t that make my bags lighter?”

“Kreh kreh!”

“It would still be a burden, since the magic would take more of a toll on you,” Amelia had responded.

She was right. Magic wasn’t all-powerful.

It wasn’t unusual to hear of people in my Fore Elf village being taken to the clinic for magic overuse. Consumption of magical energy had a direct effect on the body. That’s what our healer had told me.

I still didn’t know how to confront the issue of the magical energy dwelling in me. My plan was to talk to Captain Ludtink at some point. I couldn’t allow Zara to carry this heavy burden alone. Then, with Captain Ludtink’s permission, I also wanted to inform Garr, Ulgus, and Liselotte. I wanted everyone to know about it so that I could ask for their advice...but that was probably just me being selfish.

Worrying about it wouldn’t do me any good. Right now, I needed to focus on the job at hand. I turned around and saw Ulgus running toward me from a distance.

“Looks like the carriage is ready, Medic Risurisu!”

“Okay!”

I needed to get going.

“Kreh kreh!”

“Hm?”

Amelia had a laundry pole in her mouth. She handed it to me.

“No, I don’t need a laundry pole for...”

But that was when it hit me. This was no laundry pole—it was a *magic* pole. I completely forgot, since it looked so ordinary.

“You know, how sad is it that I just got a pole?” I sighed.

“Kreeeeh!”

“*Why not whittle down the tip and make a spear?*” Amelia was suggesting. It was a wild idea that I liked the sound of.

“Bye-bye everyone!!”

With Charlotte seeing us off, the expedition had officially begun.



GARR drove our carriage down the city streets. I appreciated what a careful driver he was. Inside the carriage, Captain Ludtink was seated with his arms crossed, looking particularly solemn. Next to him was the member who’d lost the argument about who would have to sit beside the captain—Ulgus. He looked remarkably uncomfortable. Vice Captain Velrey sat across from them, with Liselotte and me at her sides. We chatted and groomed Amelia’s coat.

Zara was seated next to Ulgus, staring out the window at the passing sights. Amelia lost a feather while we were grooming her, so I stuck it in the coat pocket of the gloomy Ulgus.

The wide-eyed Ulgus spotted the feather and immediately lit up.

I’m glad he’s happy now. But just as I had that thought, a cry of protest rang out.

“Kreeeeh!”

“Huh?!”

“I don’t want to give him my feather...” Amelia was complaining.

What should I do? Is this her rebellious phase?

Ulgus was twirling her feather around in his fingers, gazing at it with sparkling eyes. I couldn’t exactly demand it back from him in that state.

As I struggled with what to do, Zara noticed my distress.

“What’s wrong, Melly?”

“U-Um, you see...”

I moved to Zara’s side and leaned in to whisper in his ear, but then...

As soon as I got closer, Zara moved away from me and banged his head loudly against the window.

“What’s wrong with you, Zara?”

The captain had noticed the fuss. I wasn’t sure what had happened either, exactly.

“S-Sorry. I just got scared by a bug,” he stammered.

“Oh, I see. Where’s the bug?” I asked.

“It flew off somewhere, I guess.”

“That’s good to hear.” I tried to ask my question again now that the bug was gone. “Sorry to bother you, but Amelia said she didn’t want me giving her feathers to Ulgus.”

“Oh dear. Is that right?”

“Do you know why that might be?”

“Well...”

I backed away from him a bit and noticed that something wasn’t right. Zara’s face was bright red.

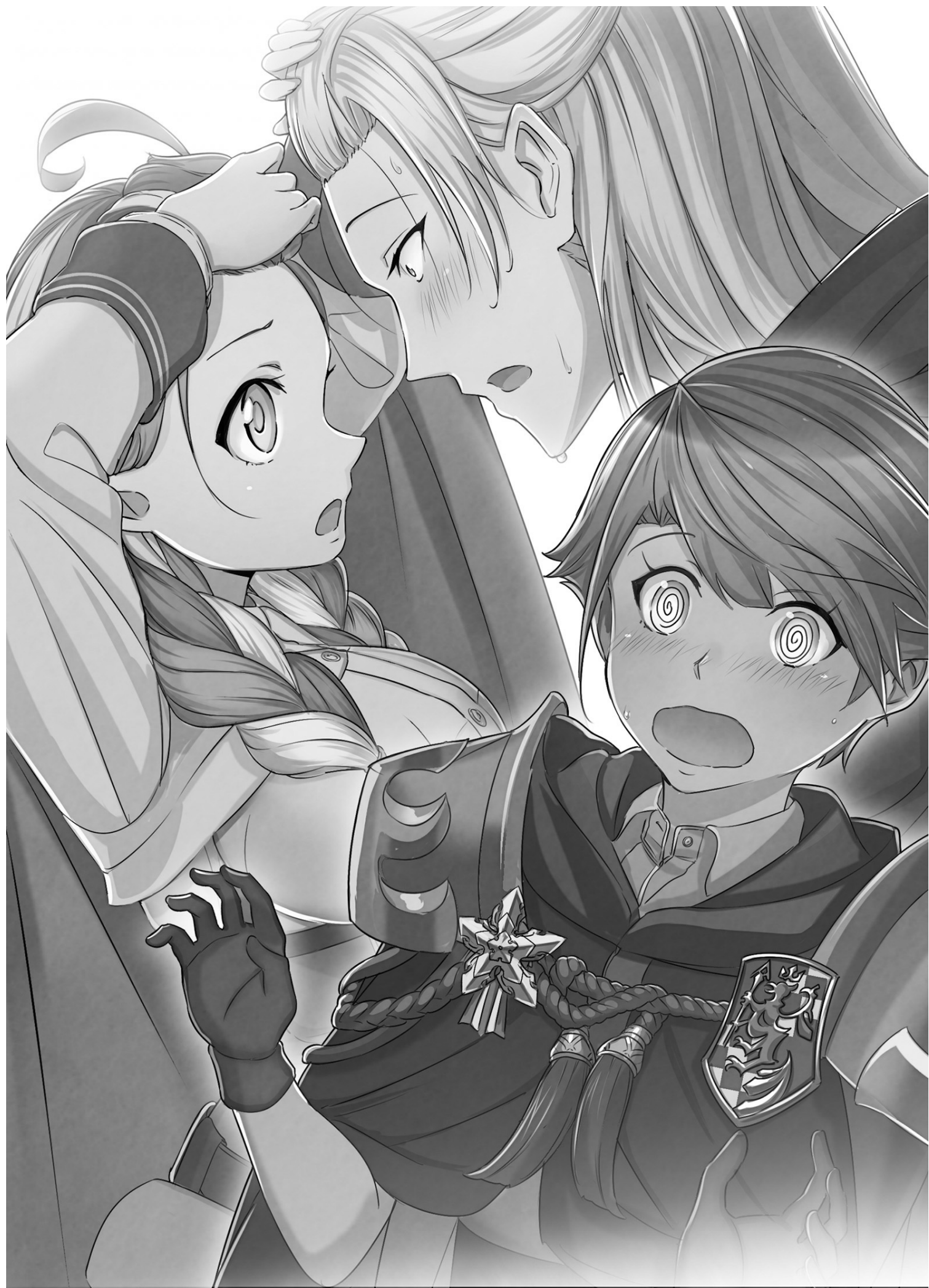
“Um, are you all right?” I asked.

“Huh? What do you mean?” Zara flinched and looked at me with a surprised expression. He had been acting suspiciously for a while now.

“Do you have a fever?”

When I pressed his bangs back and felt his forehead, Zara began to tremble.

He must really have a bad fever.



I pressed my fingers to his red cheeks to cool them down. I turned to Captain Ludtink to ask what we should do, but Vice Captain Velrey called out to me instead.

“M-Medic Mellmell! Zara’s just fine!”

“Vice Captain, she’s Medic Risurisu, not Medic Mellmell,” Ulgus made sure to correct her.

“S-Sorry. Medic Risurisu. Zara’s fine, so come back over here.”

“O-Okay... I will.”

He clearly looked like he was on the verge of a cold, but the vice captain said he was okay, so I had no choice but to believe her.

“I’ve figured it out! Zara Ahto is—” Liselotte suddenly cried out loudly.

Vice Captain Velrey stood up and pressed her fingers to Liselotte’s lips.

“Mmph!”

“J-Just tell me, not them.”

Now Vice Captain Velrey was the one acting suspicious. Just what was going on? The two of them were exchanging some sort of secret.

“Huh? Ah, I get it. Uh-huh. That makes sense.”

“That’s as far as I’ve discovered.”

“Thanks, Sorcerer Lichtenberger.”

“Now pass it on.”

The vice captain turned to me and whispered Liselotte’s discovery into my ear.

“It sounds like Amelia is embarrassed to have a young man own one of her feathers.”

“Ah, I see.”

I tried to imagine myself in her position. If a man had a lock of my hair that he was treating like a toy, I could see myself being unsettled too. I failed to interpret it that way before. Amelia was a young lady in her own right.

Vice Captain Velrey explained the situation to Ulgus. She told him how Amelia was sensitive like a young girl and felt embarrassed to see her feathers in someone else's hands.

"Ah, I get it. I didn't know she felt that way. I'm sorry. It was so pretty, I just got really happy." He returned the feather to Amelia.

I made sure to tell her that he was just pleased by the beauty of her feather.

"Kreh kreh."

"Huh? Really?"

"Kreh!"

Shockingly, she told me that she didn't mind giving him her feather if he felt that strongly about it. With that, the feather returned to Ulgus's hands.

"Woohoo! Thanks so much!"

From what I could tell, Amelia didn't hate the sight of him rejoicing over her gift. But Amelia's delicate heart was growing more and more complex.

Actually, is she even more feminine than I am? Suddenly I feel so defeated...!



ALONG our journey, we stopped next to a lake to change drivers and let the horses rest.

"I'll check the water quality," I announced to the others. One of the seven tools that combat medics carried was an instrument for confirming if water was able to be consumed. "It looks drinkable."

With that, Captain Ludtink stuck his hands in and gulped water straight out of them. I decided to boil the water so that I wouldn't get a stomachache. Then I added tea leaves to make a batch of tea. I filled each cup with plenty of sugar and honey then passed them out to each member.

"...It tastes like blasphemy against the tea leaves."

Liselotte gave her harsh remarks after trying a sip of the tea. I couldn't find it in me to say that I was too lazy to take the tea utensils out of my bag. Instead, I made the claim that this was the tea we drank on expeditions.

“Ah!” I spotted some bright red fruit growing on a nearby tree. Rushing up to it gleefully, I found the fruit was too high for me to reach. When he saw me hopping up in the air, Garr came over and cut the fruit down for me.

“Whoa! Thank you!”

These were a rare fruit called raspberries that ripened between autumn and winter. I popped one right in my mouth. It tasted...so tart that I wanted to pass out.

“Ugh! It’s really sour!” I groaned.

Amelia had come over to us, so I fed her one too.

“K-Kreeeh!”

Yep. It was too sour for her too. These really needed to be simmered with sugar first. They would probably make a nice sauce for a meat dish.

I decided to take the raspberries with me since I could probably cook with them.



CAPTAIN Ludtink took over driving the carriage. We proceeded forward toward our destination—the forest.

An hour or so after our break, we arrived at the hut of the man in charge of the forest. The man who emerged from the hut was a little older than middle-aged. He explained to us that this forest was full of trees that contained lots of sap. Tradesmen would come here and pay the manager for permission to harvest the nectar.

The sugar content of the tree sap increased between winter and spring, meaning that now was the perfect time to harvest it. But the threat of the laughing ivy was keeping all the tradesmen away.

“The laughing ivy attacks tradesmen, steals their belongings, and runs off with them,” he explained.

Its objective was unknown, and the stolen items had yet to be found either. The ivy had long, narrow appendages, but its overall shape was a mystery. It appeared by slithering around on the ground.

“Um, I have a question.” Ulgus raised his hand. “Why is it called laughing ivy, anyway?”

“You see, the laughing ivy attacks its target by binding it...and then tickling it,” the man replied.

“Ah, I see. Thank you.”

This monster wasn't a kind that had been recorded in the monster database.

“So that's why the Monster Research Bureau was really demanding we get information on it...” Captain Ludtink had apparently been cornered by Monster Research Bureau members on his way back from his morning meeting. How unfortunate for him. “Now that I think of it, the director told me he wanted to talk to me about something else in a few days too.”

I had a bad feeling about that. Everyone had probably reached the same conclusion as me.

“Excuse me, knights. If you don't mind...” Before we could leave the hut, the manager handed us a jar, knife, and spatula.

“What are these for?”

“It's a set of tools you need to extract tree sap.”

The knife had a spell written on it. It was supposed to make the sap start flowing if plunged into a tree.

“The trees here are controlled by a feudal lord who's a sorcerer, so you won't be able to harvest any sap without a magic knife.”

“I see.”

What amazing magic.

He also explained that the owners of this land had been sorcerers for generations, but never expressed interest in selling the sap themselves. But upon receiving the advice that they could earn money through research fees, they began to deal with tradesmen for the past few dozen years.

“Please give the sap a taste if you so desire. It is most delicious. By the way, the sap from this forest is sold as a luxury item. A single jar costs up to a full

gold coin.”

When I heard that, I knew I wanted to try it for myself.

“Tree sap... I’ve never tried any before.”

“It’s best when drizzled over pancakes.”

“Oh, that sounds delicious.”

The tree sap was supposedly made edible by straining it, then boiling it into a nectar. Once it turned a beautiful amber color, it was ready to eat.

“It’s even more beautiful than actual amber...”

“Wow!”

I was entranced by the thought, but Captain Ludtink had to give me a warning—our mission was to exterminate the laughing ivy, not harvest sap.

“I know that.” I struck my magic pole against the ground, causing the captain to tense up.

“Don’t think you can come to the front when we’re fighting just because you’ve got your own equipment now,” he stressed.

“I understand that much.”

After saluting him along with that response, it was time to head into the forest.



THERE was a thin layer of snow on the forest floor. A white cloud emerged from my lips with each breath while my fingertips grew numb.

“Are you doing all right, Amelia? Are you cold?” I asked her.

“Kreh!”

Amelia’s equipment included her bonnet, the handkerchief she received that morning, and the handmade cloak Zara had made for her. But her fluffy layer of feathers was keeping her warm.

The trees with nectar to be harvested were called sap maples and had unique yellow trunks. They were currently scattered around the forest with

recognizably large leaves, about as big as the palm of your hand. I spotted one right away.

“Risurisu. You wanted to lick that tree’s nectar, didn’t you? Go ahead and try cutting it.” Captain Ludtink gave me permission to try the sap out of concern that I was getting too distracted and would jeopardize the mission.

“Lick the tree’s nectar? I’m not a bug,” I pouted. I couldn’t believe he thought I would prioritize tree sap over our duties. I was a little offended.

“You’re not gonna taste it?”

“I may as well, since it’s right here.”

I cut into the trunk with my enchanted knife. Sap started to ooze out from inside, so I scraped it up with my spatula. The sap looked a lot smoother than I expected. It was colorless too. I assumed it would thicken up once boiled. I swiped some with my fingertip and licked it up.

“Wow! It’s so sweet!”

The sap had a rich sweetness alongside other subtle flavors that filled my mouth. It had a delicious scent as well. The other members tried it after me, and I saw the surprised looks on all their faces. I definitely wanted to harvest some and cook with it.

“Satisfied?”

“Yes, thank you.”

I would have to harvest some later. For now, the investigation took precedence.

“Still, ivy that slithers around the ground sure does seem strange...” Ulgus was murmuring to himself.

The most famous vine monster was a mysterious plant that resembled a daikon. They had vines coming out of their heads that they used to bind enemies. But according to the report, no one here had witnessed such plants. All of the victims described vines slithering out of the ground to bind and tickle them.

“Kreh!”

“Hm?”

“Enemies approaching!” Amelia cried.

I listened closely and heard the sound of four-footed animals approaching. Garr noticed it too, and reported the number of enemies to Captain Ludtink.

Vice Captain Velrey shouted our orders. “All units, prepare for battle! Medic Risurisu, Sorcerer Lichtenberger, Amelia, head to the rear.”

Everyone readied their weapons to do battle with the approaching monsters.

The beasts that arrived to attack us were...gray wolves. They were slightly larger than Amelia and had horns jutting out of their brows. There were ten of them—likely a pack. It was a larger number than usual.

“Kreeeh!” Amelia stood in front of Liselotte and me and spread her wings. She was trying to protect us.

“Medic Risurisu, be careful of your back too.”

“Roger!”

The larger wolf growling at us was probably the pack leader. One by one, the gray wolves jumped forward to attack.

Captain Ludtink swung his jet-black great sword—the magic sword Superbia—and engaged with the charging gray wolf. Instead of a greeting, the wolf was met with a sharp, heavy blow. Its head detached from its torso and soared through the air, creating an arc of blood trailing behind it.

One after another, Garr attacked the wolves coming after him with his green spear—Ira. Vice Captain Velrey jumped in once the wolves were staggered and sliced off their heads with Avaritia, her beautiful twin blades.

A wolf had slipped past Captain Ludtink, Garr, and Vice Captain Velrey, but Zara took his golden ax—Luxuria—and cut through it entirely with one stroke.

Ulgus raised his blue bow—Acedia—and fired an arrow at the gray wolf alpha, who was waiting in the back, watching over the fight. The arrow struck the beast beneath the horn, killing it instantly.

Liselotte watched the battle, murmuring her impressions to herself. “Looks

like I won't get to play any part in this."

"Indeed. They're all so strong."

"Kreh!"

They were so strong, in fact, that I let my guard down.

I kept my attention on my back, but was too distracted to notice the vine creeping down on me from above.

"...Wha—?"

Something was coiling around my waist.

"Kreeeeeee!!"

"Huh? Mell?! No way!"

"Eeeek!"

Before I knew it, I was dragged up to the tree above me, dangling in mid-air. The laughing ivy had wrapped itself around me. I never expected it to attack from above.

"Oh no! Melly!"

"Zara, focus on the battle!"

Zara had been scolded by Captain Ludtink because of me. I couldn't help but feel guilty.

Aside from feeling guilty, I was also embarrassed. Being strung upside down meant my coat and skirt were flipped back, exposing the shorts I wore underneath and my bare legs. The ivy was coiled around my limbs now too.

"Just wait, Mell. I'll get you down from th—"

"Don't move, Sorcerer Lichtenberger! You can't use a spell!"

This time, Vice Captain Velrey sprung forward to stop Liselotte. She made this call because she'd once witnessed Liselotte's massive fireball spell. I was a bit scared of it too.

"Ulgus, save Risurisu!" Captain Ludtink shouted orders for Ulgus. Those orders made me feel guilty too.

“Roger!”

I intended to wait patiently until I was saved, but then the second vine appeared and began its attack.

“...Huh?!”

It slid underneath my shirt, rubbing against my bare skin. Then it began to stroke my stomach.

“Aha,ahaha! Stop it! Hahahaha!”

In the tension-stricken forest, my laughter echoed out in vain. The vines wriggled and slid around me. With my arms and legs bound, I was unable to resist.

But that wasn’t all the vines were doing.

“Ahahaha! Ah, whoa, hyaaah!”

I had begun to swing from left to right. I realized it must be trying to dodge Ulgus’s arrows. It was tickling me and spinning me round and round. I couldn’t take it anymore...

Just as my vision was about to black out, I heard Amelia let out a roar. Her deep cry rippled through the air, sending out shockwaves.

“Kreeeeeeeh!!”

I heard a loud thumping of wings. Amelia jumped off the ground and rose up into the air.

“Kreeeeeeeeeh!!!”

She flapped her wings over and over again, drawing closer to me.



I was so shocked to see that she could fly. I forgot about my situation and started to shout, “Wow, Amelia! Amazing! You’re flying!”

Once she flew up to me, she dug her beak into the vines.

“Kreh kreh!”

“*Who the hell are you?!*” she was asking the plants. I could feel the ivy tremble in shock. But that was when a vine emerged from another area and began to approach Amelia.

“Mell, Amelia, hold still for a minute!”

When I heard Liselotte shout, I completely froze up.

As soon as Amelia retreated, I heard the thunderous sound of wind followed by something piercing the trunk of a tree. I craned my body to look in that direction and saw that an arrow had struck the vine and pinned it to the tree. I realized it was the work of Ulgus.

Another rain of arrows went sailing by, tearing the vine to shreds. Ulgus was as accurate a shot as ever. But as I hung there in the air, I suddenly felt that my limbs and torso were unbound.

“Gyah!”

“Kreeeh!”

I’m gonna fall! Despite this fear, Amelia came forward and caught me with her body.

“Oof!”

“Kreeeeh!”

I’d succeeded in landing, but the force of my fall caused me to go rolling along the ground. I collided with a large tree trunk and fell still.

“Urk!”

“Mell!”

“Medic Risurisu!”

Ulgus and Liselotte helped me sit up while Vice Captain Velrey sprinted past

them. It appeared that the laughing ivy was, in fact, still alive. It had only fled the scene. The quick-footed Vice Captain Velrey pursued the ivy while Garr followed from behind.

They had finished exterminating the gray wolves.

“Ah, whoa...”

In my dazed state, I noticed Amelia staring at my face with concern. It snapped me out of it.

“Amelia, you’re so amazing! You can fly now!!”

“Kreh kreh!”

Amelia jumped off the ground again and gave her wings a flap. I watched her float right up into the air and start to fly circles above my head. I was so relieved. That wing of hers that had once been broken was now capable of flight. I felt my eyes start to sting as the emotions hit me.

I needed to go see Lord Lichtenberger and thank him for treating Amelia’s wing. I was filled with happiness. I wrapped my arms around Amelia once she descended and buried my face in her feathers.

“Kreh!”

“Thanks for rescuing me.”

“Kreh!”

“Of course!” she told me. I thanked Ulgus too.

When I raised my head, Zara was closer to me than before.

“Are you all right, Melly?”

“Ah, yes, I am. Thank you.”

“That’s wonderful...”

I-Is it really so wonderful?

I couldn’t help but think that when I looked past Zara. There stood Captain Ludtink, his sword covered in blood, his face more frightening than usual.

“Zara.”

The captain grabbed Zara's shoulder. As soon as Zara spun around, Captain Ludtink gave him a headbutt. But then something unexpected happened. The aggressor, Captain Ludtink, was holding his forehead and letting out a cry of agony.

"Ow! Damn you, rock-head!"

It appeared that Zara's head was harder than Captain Ludtink's. I bit my lip to hold in the laughter I felt coming on.

"Damn it..."

"I'm sorry I have a hard head," Zara pouted.

"What the hell did you eat to get a head like that...? Wait, that's not the issue!"

Zara had taken his eyes off the gray wolves as soon as I was grabbed by the laughing ivy. That was a potentially fatal mistake.

"If you ever do that again, I'll kick you out of the second squadron."

"Yes, I get it. I'll be careful not to do it again."

The captain gave Zara's shoulder a loud thump. "You better," he warned him menacingly.

The next person in the line of fire was me.

"Risurisu, you..."

His face was terrifying. I didn't think I'd ever seen him make such a scary face.

My brow broke out in a cold sweat. My heart was racing.

"Be more careful."

"Y-Yes, sir."

I'd been looking up at Captain Ludtink, fully prepared to receive a headbutt and a scolding, but he only gave me a mild warning instead.

The forest returned to its state of silence.

Captain Ludtink dug at the ground to bury the wolf corpses. Zara gave him a hand.

Relief flooded my body, taking all my strength with it. I sunk down on the spot.

“Kreh kreh!” Amelia came to support me this time.

“S-Sorry about that.”

“Kreeeh!”

Between the fight with the gray wolves and the laughing ivy attack, my usually shameless nerves had been whittled down.

“Captain Ludtink, do you know what these vines are?” Ulgus had climbed the tree and brought back the laughing ivy he struck with his arrows.

The vines were about as thick as an adult man’s thumb. They were yellow-green in color without any thorns, and the inside was the same color too. To avoid a situation where the vine started moving again or secretly contained poison, he put it in a jar and soaked it in holy water.

“I feel like they’re not the usual mystery plant vines,” Captain Ludtink said. He explained that the normal vegetable monsters had dark green vines and a gelatinous texture inside. The color and insides were different from the vines that just attacked me.

“Medic Risurisu, did you see anything on the other end of the vines?” Ulgus asked me.

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t figure out what was happening at all, since I was upside-down in the air.”

“Right, I thought so.”

Liselotte and Amelia, who’d been right underneath me, only saw the vines too. The mystery deepened. We looked at the vine in the jar and discussed what it could be until Vice Captain Velrey and Garr returned. They had chased it down, but didn’t find the source.

“We know which way it went. We’ll just have to check every nook and cranny.” Captain Ludtink had an intense look on his face as he spoke. I couldn’t understand why he said this job might end in a single day. Well, most likely, he thought this was all the work of a mystery plant.

We returned to the path and headed to a somewhat open area of the forest we'd passed through earlier.

Vice Captain Velrey gave us orders. "Risurisu, Lichtenberger, and Amelia. You three wait here."

"All right."

"Roger that."

"Kreh!"

There was nothing to worry about as long as Liselotte was casting a barrier for us. We would only be a burden if we stayed with the others any longer.

The rest of our squadmates left the three of us behind and went out in pursuit of the laughing ivy. There just happened to be a sap maple within Liselotte's barrier. While I had the time, I decided to harvest the sap.

I cut into it with my knife a few times to let the nectar ooze out. I scooped it up with my spatula, drizzled it into a jar, and repeated the less-than-exciting process again.

My jar was full after about an hour. There were a few wood chips floating within the sap, but I didn't have any tools to strain it with.

"What are you going to do with that?" Liselotte asked.

"There's nothing else to do, so I thought I would boil it down."

"Hmm."

I collected some rocks from our surroundings and built a simple stove. Then I inserted some peat I made earlier and had Liselotte light it for me. I placed my pot on the stove and poured in the freshly harvested tree sap. It began to make a bubbling sound as it simmered, bringing a sweet scent with it. The sap gradually began to turn from transparent to amber the longer it cooked.

After it boiled for about half an hour, the result was nectar that glimmered in the sunlight.

"Shall we have lunch?" I suggested.

"Sure."

Captain Ludtink and the others had left with bread and jerky. They were probably eating along the way. I looked at my watch and saw that it was past lunchtime. I'd been staring inside my pot to watch the nectar transform in color, but I completely forgot to pay attention to the time.

Amelia rummaged through her bag to find the pouch with dried fruit inside. I took out a loaf of bread and cut it into slices. Then I spread some of the fresh nectar onto a slice and took a bite.

"Mmmm!"

It was even richer in taste than before. It was sweeter and more fragrant too, causing the scent to tickle my nose in a mouth-watering way. This sap went perfectly with a piece of fluffy bread. The sweetness wasn't overpowering at all. I felt like I could eat slice after slice of this combination.

A piece of salty jerky was especially good after the sweet bread. I would usually be satisfied after one slice, but I ended up eating three more after that.

Liselotte seemed curious too. She excitedly mentioned that she would go buy some for herself once we returned to the royal capital. She was really considering buying nectar that costs an entire gold coin. What a scary thought.

I added water to the empty pot of sap and let it boil. This would clean it for now, since I couldn't go wash it. It also smelled delicious this way. I poured the hot water into a cup and detected a faint sweet smell from it. This drink was tasty in its own way.

Amelia wanted some too. I poured her a cup. Watching her blow on the drink to cool it was utterly adorable.

"Anyway, I hope the others are doing all right," I said.

"I can't imagine those people ever being defeated."

"That's true."

Still, I prayed for their safe return.

It was another hour before our squadmates returned.

"That was a total mess." Vice Captain Velrey sounded uncharacteristically worn out.

“Huh?”

Captain Ludtink was holding something shocking in his hand.

“That’s...”

It was a furry white creature with round eyes and a long body. *A ferret?*

Ferret fur retains heat very efficiently. It was also soft and beautiful, which was why it was sold as a luxury item. The captain explained that this ferret apparently was the source of the forest’s disturbance.

Is it a mythical beast? I glanced at Liselotte, but she was only glaring at the squirming ferret with absolute disgust on her face. That was my answer. This was no mythical beast.

“Um, Captain Ludtink? What is that thing?” I asked.

“A high fairy, apparently.”

“Whaaaat?!”

It looked no different from an ordinary animal to me. Could intelligence be lurking behind those deep green eyes?

“L-Let me go, you big bandit!” The ferret screeched out in a shrill voice. It was hard to imagine this was any fairy. Hmm...

Still, I couldn’t believe Captain Ludtink got himself called a “bandit” by a fairy now too. His true identity was still the son of an earl, after all.

“Risurisu, you ate something sweet, didn’t you?” he asked.

“Yes. I boiled the tree sap to make syrup.”

“That sweet scent is what lured this guy out of hiding.”

“I-I see.”

I also learned that they’d stored the ferret in a leather bag at first, but it kept undoing the strings with magic, so Captain Ludtink had to keep it firmly in his fist.

“He’s a real glutton,” the captain said. “He’s been targeting human luggage so that he can eat their food.”

“I see. So that’s why he attacked me.”

It was inevitable that I, as the cook, would be the one targeted. But the case was closed now that they’d captured the bad fairy behind it all.

Captain Ludtink let out a long sigh before giving me an order. “I’m starving. Make me something, Risurisu.”

“Were you all too busy to eat?”

“Yeah, we were.”

“I see. Thank you for the hard work.”

As I planned to make hot soup and something with the tree sap, Garr presented me with his findings.

“Huh?! Where did you get these?”

Garr had a handful of mushrooms and tree nuts.

“Wow! These are great!”

He’d even managed to collect snow mushrooms. Those were sold as a delicacy in the royal capital.

“Thank you, Garr!” I exclaimed.

He explained that he’d gathered them during a rest period. I knew I could make a meal out of these ingredients.

I started by pouring water into my pot, then chopping up the snow mushrooms with my knife and adding them first. I also added smoked boar-pig meat and jerky. Then I mixed in dried potatoes, salt and pepper, and spices to set the flavor.

As for the nuts, I crushed them, peeled the skins, and used my mortar to grind them into a powder. Then I took that powder and added wheat flour, sugar, and a bit of salt, stirring the mixture up like I was kneading it together.

Next, I constructed another simple stove.

I placed a shallow pot over the fire and cooked the dough. I could make three layers at once, about bite-sized or a little larger. Once I saw the brown color had formed, my tree nut mini pancakes were complete. They could be eaten with

tree syrup, although that alone would be very sweet, so I added some of the raspberries Garr picked for me earlier.

Though it was simple, the meal was complete.

I gave everyone two pancakes to be eaten as an after-meal dessert. The soup was meant to be eaten with bread.

Underneath the winter sky, we spread out a mat to have our meal on.

“How are you going to eat, Captain Ludtink?”

It was a simple question from Ulgus. Captain Ludtink was holding the ferret with his right hand. It looked like it would be difficult to eat like that. Besides...

“Hey! Big bandit! Gimme some of that sweet-smelling food!”

He was just so...*lively*. The ferret thrashed around, demanding his own pancakes. Captain Ludtink simply ignored him.

“He’s been like this the whole time. I sure as hell can’t let go of ‘im.”

Surely it would be difficult to eat with his non-dominant hand.

“Then I can feed y—”

“Captain Ludtink! Let me feed you as an apology for my earlier mistake!”

I was trying to be the one to volunteer, but someone sounded even more motivated than me. It was Zara. He sat down next to the captain and picked up his bowl of soup. Then he took a spoonful and brought it up to the captain’s mouth.

“Should I blow on it first?”

“You better not,” Captain Ludtink immediately shot him down. “That’s plain disturbing.”

Zara brought the hot soup to his lips. That was when I remembered how Captain Ludtink was sensitive to hot foods...

“Ow!!”

He flinched as soon as the hot soup made contact with his lip. It all went spilling out of the spoon. But Captain Ludtink wasn’t the only victim.

"Gyaaah! The boiling soup got on my heeaaaad!!"

The soup had landed on the ferret too.

"Oh dear. Forgive me."

"I'll have the soup last," the captain sighed. "Just gimme bread for now."

"Sure thing." Zara slathered the tree nectar onto a slice and stuck it out, only for Captain Ludtink to turn his nose away from the offering.

"What's this about?"

"You know I don't like sweet foods," Captain Ludtink huffed.

"Now's not the time to be picky," Zara tutted.

The ferret chose his time to strike. He stretched his hand out. *"I love sweet foods!"*

"You don't get any."

"How cruel..."

It was strange, but the interactions between Captain Ludtink, Zara, and the ferret were pretty entertaining.

"Mell, your soup's getting cold."

"Ah, that's right."

Liselotte snapped me out of my daze.

I decided to eat while my soup was still warm. Liselotte and I had already filled up on bread earlier, so we took small bowls of soup that were just enough to test out the taste.

The snow mushrooms inside were crisp and aromatic, beginning to dissolve in the rich broth of the soup. They were very delicious indeed. The nut pancakes were soft and doughy. They gave off the strong, appetizing aroma of the nuts. This was another outstanding combination when paired with the tree sap.

"This is really good, Medic Risurisu," Ulgus said.

"It's all thanks to the wonderful ingredients!"

They appeared to be satisfied with their meal. I went to warm up Zara's soup

again now that it had gone cold.

“Thanks a bunch, Melly.”

“Of course.”

On the other hand, Captain Ludtink had tried the cold soup and called it “Just okay.”

Of course a delicious soup is going to be “Just okay” when it’s cold. Grrrrrr. I was annoyed by his reaction.

Captain Ludtink finished up his pancakes as well.

“I’m soooo hungry! I’m gonna starve to death!”



Those cries were a bit upsetting. I asked Liselotte if he was telling the truth.

“He won’t die. He’s a fairy.” She explained that fairies survived by taking in magical energy from the air. There was no need to eat food because of this. “Well, I’m sure they can intake the magical energy that’s permeated into the food, but I don’t think they’d want to do anything so inefficient. What a strange little fairy.”

There was only a very small amount of magical energy in food, by the sound of it. I was learning a lot. I felt a bit bad for the ferret, but I couldn’t allow myself to be deceived. Captain Ludtink was handling things properly.

With that, we managed to capture the bad fairy who was causing the laughing ivy incident in the forest. We were to hand the ferret over to the Royal Order.

“I wonder who’s gonna get stuck with him?”

Ulgus looked at Liselotte. He must have thought the Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau was the right place for the creature.

“No way! He’s not a mythical beast.”

“But he kinda looks like one.”

“Mythical beasts are nothing like that thing!”

Ulgus cocked his head. I wasn’t quite sure of the distinction between mythical beasts and fairies myself.

“Mythical beasts are proud, gentle creatures. They would never scheme and trouble people like this!”

Hearing her claims made me understand what the difference was. Indeed, it might be hard to tell them apart based on appearance, but their attitude and actions sounded very different.

“Hey, stop chit-chatting. Let’s go home,” Captain Ludtink ordered.

“Yes, sir!”

“Understood.”

We wanted to get home before the sun set. I was chilled to the bone, so I couldn’t wait to get back to the dorm and take a hot bath.

The forest manager was extremely shocked when we reported back to him. He then thanked us for our help and sent us back with bottles of tree sap.

I got to head home with a happy feeling in my heart.

Our safe drivers, Garr and Vice Captain Velrey, drove the carriage on the way back.

We arrived at the royal capital just as the evening bell was sounding. The people on the streets were rushing home.

“Damn you, Bandit! I’ll never forgive you!”

As always, the ferret was putting up a struggle in the grasp of Captain Ludtink’s hand.

Just who would end up taking him in the end?

That question remained in the back of my mind.

Chapter 6: Baked Leaf-Wrapped Boar-Pig

THE next morning, Liselotte looked disheartened when she appeared in the breakroom.

“Good morning.”

“Morning.”

When I asked her what was wrong, she gave an annoyed explanation.

“That fairy from yesterday was given to the Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau.”

“Oh no...”

I decided not to voice my thought of “Go figure” out loud.

“So Father brought it home with him yesterday and the house was turned into a total disaster...”

“That sounds terrible.”

In the end, Lord Lichtenberger forced the creature into a contract with him. The ferret fairy was currently behaving himself in the Lichtenberger manor.

“That *thing* isn’t even a mythical beast... Father’s lost his mind.”

The rift between father and daughter appeared to be deepening. Maybe Lord Lichtenberger simply loved cute animals, not just mythical beasts... Despite his cocky personality, the ferret was pretty adorable on the outside. He probably couldn’t hatch any schemes under the watchful eye of the strict Lord Lichtenberger. Actually, that ferret was definitely in for a life of luxury. Maybe the contract was a good thing?

“I wish a mythical beast had come to live with us, not some obnoxious fairy...” Liselotte sounded depressed.

Amelia seemed to notice this too. She made the rare move of approaching

Liselotte herself. “Kreh?”

“Huh?” Liselotte stared at Amelia, clearly startled by the unusual gesture. Then she asked me to translate for her.

“Um, she asked if you’re okay and if you want to pet her,” I interpreted.

“I-I can’t believe it...” Liselotte, now turning bright red, pressed her hand to her cheek. “A-Are you quite sure?”

“She says you can pet her as much as you want.”

“No way... I-It’s like a dream come true...”

With very deliberate motions, Liselotte brought her hand to the feathers underneath Amelia’s beak. She started with simple strokes. As time went by, she sunk her fingers in deeper and began to comb through the feathers. Amelia’s eyes began to squint in what looked like pleasure, perhaps because Liselotte was skilled at petting her in all the right spots.

“Th-Thank you, Amelia. Your feathers feel so smooth and lovely.”

“Kreh kreh!”

“You can pet me whenever you want!” Amelia seemed pleased with the praise for her feathers. I conveyed the message to Liselotte too.

“Oh my goodness... I’m so happy...”

Emotions overcame her and tears formed in her eyes. I never expected her to be so overjoyed.

...But someone was jealously watching over our heartwarming moment from a corner of the room. Naturally, it was Ulgus.

“Medic Risurisu, I’m feeling kinda sad too.”

“Okay.”

“What should I do?”

“Uhh...”

I looked at Amelia. As soon as I pointed at Ulgus, she stuck up her nose and turned away. Amelia had a finishing blow for him too.

“Kreh kreh!”

“No pets for Ulgus!” she told me.

Ulgus’s shoulders slumped—I knew I didn’t even need to translate for him. “Still, it’s amazing how well you and Amelia understand each other,” he commented.

“That’s the power of our contract.”

I only heard her audible cries of “Kreh kreh.” I just somehow knew what they meant each time. Liselotte had told me that this was sometimes possible after a contract was formed.

“So that means not everyone automatically knows what their mythical beast is saying just because they have a contract?” he asked.

“That’s how I understand it.”

Zara told me he couldn’t understand what his mountain cat said. These contracts had many different forms.

The bell signaling the start of the workday rang. Liselotte, Ulgus, Amelia, and I all headed to the captain’s office.

Today’s schedule was set aside for training. Ulgus, who struggled with close-range combat, looked displeased. Liselotte asked if she would be training too.

“Of course,” the captain snipped at her.

Right. This was a training session for all members. Vice Captain Velrey would lead the women. We were going to borrow the Royal Order’s training grounds for half a day, which sounded like it was going to be a rough time.

“I can’t believe I got roped up into this foolishness.”

“It’s training to fight against people, so it can’t be avoided.”

The royal capital was hosting a festival soon. As an expeditionary squadron, we would be dispatched to patrol the festival.

We started our day by jogging around the training grounds to warm up. I was unbelievably slow, so I was passed by Garr, then Captain Ludtink...and before I knew it, I was a full lap behind.

“You’ve got this, Melly!”

“Right!”

Zara cheered me on, but then I was passed by Vice Captain Velrey. Ulgus caught up to me next.

“Are you okay, Medic Risurisu?”

“...Yes.”

“Do your best!”

Ulgus still seemed to have plenty of energy. He dashed right past me.

“Kreeeh!”

“What?!”

I never expected Amelia to surpass me too. She obviously had more stamina than I thought she did. However, there was one person even less athletic than me—Liselotte. We only ran for about fifteen minutes, but her face was bright red and sweaty by the time we finished. She looked ready to hit the floor.

“Liselotte, would you prefer to watch our training instead?” I asked.

“No... I’ll...participate...too...”

“Then you should take a short break first.”

I ended up dehydrated just like Liselotte on my first day of training. I hadn’t consumed enough water, so I felt miserable by the time I returned to the dorm. But this time, I knew we were doing training in advance, so I came prepared with something special.

Honey lemon water!

This was the ultimate drink. It kept you hydrated, improved your health, and even made your skin clearer. Honey helps recover from fatigue, while lemon promotes a faster metabolism and protects against blotches and bumps of the skin. It’s the perfect drink to consume underneath the sunlight.

It was simple enough to make. I dissolved honey in boiling water and added a pinch of salt. Once it cooled down, I added round slices of lemon with the peel on as well as squeezed lemon juice, mixed it all together, and let it sit in a cool,

dark place overnight. It just needed to be filtered the next day, and then it was ready to drink. Honey lemon water was also delicious when enjoyed warm with ginger.

“Here you go,” I said, offering her the jar.

“No thank you. I’m not thirsty.”

“You should have some anyway. The body still requires water, even when you don’t feel like it.” Vice Captain Velrey also suggested she have some water, so Liselotte accepted the jar and unscrewed the lid.

“Um, is there some sort of cup...?”

“Sorry, I forgot to bring one.”

She seemed annoyed by the suggestion to drink it as it was.

“Why don’t you try drinking out of your hands? Although, they’ll probably get sticky...”

“...Well, I suppose that’s better than drinking out of a jar.”

Liselotte held out her hands like a cup, so I poured the honey lemon water into them.

Ah, it’s dribbling out from between her fingers. What a waste.

“Please drink it quickly, Liselotte.”

“R-Right.”

Liselotte brought it right up to her lips. She ended up drinking about half of the jar.

“How was it?”

“I drank too fast to taste the flavor.”

“O-Oh...” I gulped down the water from the jar next. Yes, it was delicious.

Vice Captain Velrey also called my water tasty and easy to drink. I thought of letting Amelia drink some too, but I didn’t have a container for her.

“Why not use my hands then?” Liselotte offered.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, of course.”

Liselotte was such a kind young lady. She went down on one knee and held her hands up in a position Amelia would be able to reach. I poured honey lemon water into her hands, which Amelia lapped up, her tail wagging.

“Kreeeh!”

She seemed pleased with the drink. Amelia bowed her head elegantly toward Liselotte as thanks. What a refined griffin she was.

Training resumed after our short break.

The men had already started up again. I let out a cry of “Whoooa!” in admiration at the sight of Garr flinging Captain Ludtink into the air.

“Oh no... Don’t tell me we have to do that too!” Liselotte cried out in horror.

“No, don’t worry. Your main job is to memorize physical skills.” Vice Captain Velrey began to explain the vital spots of the human body. “Starting from the top, the first point is the temple. Striking someone in the temple causes them to lose their balance. Then there’s the mastoid bone. It’s a protruding spot behind the ear which also disrupts the sense of balance when hit. Next up is the philtrum, which is the space between the lips and nose. Hitting someone here causes them breathing difficulty. Finally, you can strike the jaw hard to knock someone unconscious. Hitting people in these weak spots can possibly be fatal to them, so it’s only to be used as a last resort.”

The vice captain instructed us on other points too.

“Well, judging by what I’ve seen from the two of you, I don’t think you’re suited for physical combat.” She’d figured out that Liselotte and I were terrible athletes.

“Vice Captain Velrey, what can I use for countermeasures then?” I asked.

“Right, let’s see...”

She looked over toward Captain Ludtink. I certainly wouldn’t be able to restrain a giant man like him if he started causing trouble. Or so I thought.

“There’s just one method.”

The three of us gulped as we listened closely.

Vice Captain Velrey looked off in the distance as she explained: “The crotch.”

“Ahh...”

“Huh? The what?”

I understood right away, but Liselotte didn’t seem to get it. Indeed, probably even Captain Ludtink could be knocked down in one hit with that strategy.

The vice captain made sure to give Liselotte a thorough explanation of what the crotch meant. “And there you have it.”

“What, really? I-I had no idea.” Liselotte adjusted her glasses. Blushing, she glanced at Captain Ludtink. “So even I could take down Captain Ludtink.”

Liselotte had been in despair about her lack of physical combat skills, but now she finally seemed to have found some confidence.

“Um, would I be allowed to try the move out on Captain Ludtink, just once?”

In response to Liselotte’s question, the vice captain squinted her eyes.

“...I’d feel too guilty, so please spare him that.”

Blinking her eyes over and over again, Liselotte murmured to herself, “What an incredible move...”



AFTER discussing the situation with Zara, we decided to consult with Captain Ludtink and Vice Captain Velrey about the issue of my magical energy. We told them that we wanted to talk to them privately after work, then headed to the captain’s office when it was time.

“I’m sorry that you had to set time aside to see us,” I said.

“It’s fine.”

Captain Ludtink was seated in his chair while Vice Captain Velrey stood at attention. I knew I needed to tell them. But I just couldn’t get the words out.

The awkward silence continued.

Finally, it was Captain Ludtink who spoke. “So, when’s the wedding?”

Zara and I both went wide-eyed at the captain's shocking question.

Even Amelia let out a slow "Kreeeeh..." She was telling him, "*It's not a wedding.*"

"That sure happened fast. Well, it's good to start a family while you're still young. So what are you thinking, Medic Risurisu? I'd like you to keep your job, but that probably won't happen—"

"H-Hang on! It's not that!" With a bright red face, Zara interrupted the captain.

"No...? Then what is it?"

"Um, I'm sorry, but I didn't ask to talk to you about any wedding," I said dryly.

The mood inside the room turned even more awkward. It seemed like he'd assumed Zara and I were getting married since we both came to him and said we needed to talk in private.

Vice Captain Velrey moved her eyes to the window to stare off into the distance.

"If you're not getting married, then what is it? Don't tell me you both want to transfer to another unit." Captain Ludtink started to look panicked. He murmured his various shortcomings under his breath, "Was it because I headbutted you? Or that the carriage was messy? Don't tell me it's because my face is scary. Is it because I threw you in training, or because I ordered you to carry luggage? No, it's gotta be the headbutt..."

Vice Captain Velrey had to stop that train of thought. "Captain, I don't think that's the issue."

"I can't think of anything else except the headbutt," he countered.

"Really, it's not that." Vice Captain Velrey was as smart as always. She read the subtleties of our facial expressions and made sure the conversation was proceeding. She told us to take our time and explain, suggesting we move to the breakroom.

I was getting hungry, so I prepared tea and a light snack. I placed black tea and biscuits on the table before sitting on the couch to begin explaining my

situation to them. I also gave Amelia some dried fruit.

“So? What the hell is it?”

“It’s about Melly’s magical energy, you see,” Zara answered for me.

Captain Ludtink should have remembered my magical energy amount from when I first came to the Order.

“She doesn’t have any, so there shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Right. Except that recently, we made a shocking discovery.” Zara explained what happened on our recent day off. “Melly used the energy measurer and it lit up red, the highest color.”

The captain and vice captain were visibly startled.

“Red-level energy...? Weren’t you measured when you joined the Order?” Captain Ludtink asked.

“I had a medical certificate from my village healer, so...”

Our village mayor sent me off with the necessary paperwork, including a certificate about my magical energy, before I left for the royal capital. I was exempted from the Order’s medical exam for that reason.

When he heard this, Captain Ludtink’s eyes went wide. Vice Captain Velrey looked down at the ground.

“You didn’t just see the instrument wrong, Zara?” Captain Ludtink asked.

“No, there was no mistaking it.” Zara shook his head.

“I see...”

Apparently, Zara had consulted Captain Ludtink about my housing arrangements before too. Since he said the house needed to allow griffins, the captain assumed we were getting married. I couldn’t believe he mistook Zara and me for lovers.

That was completely impossible. A short little elf like me could never marry a beautiful, gentle man like Zara, who was an incredible cook and as good at embroidery and sewing as a true craftsman... Just then, it hit me. Zara really felt like the perfect bride.

The silence continued while my thoughts wandered to such things.

I drank my black tea and ate a biscuit. I'd been worrying this whole time that my stomach was going to become audible to the others. We would have had lunch a long time ago on a normal day. The crunching of biscuits was all I could hear. It seemed like I was the only one here who was hungry.

Well, the biscuits were delicious, at least.

Zara had made these ginger biscuits himself. They had a kick to them and were slightly sweet. But this was not the time to enjoy biscuits. We returned to the topic at hand.

"So that slime really *did* target you because of your magical energy," Captain Ludtink finally said.

"Yes, I think so."

Captain Ludtink let out a long sigh. Vice Captain Velrey placed her hand on her forehead, wrinkling her brow.

"If I report this to my superiors, they'll definitely transfer you somewhere else."

"I don't want that to happen."

I'd only managed to get by as a knight because I was part of the Second Expeditionary Squadron. I never once thought of working for a different unit.

"Fortunately, magical energy measurements are only taken once upon entry and never again," he said. "There's no punishment for not reporting any increases you notice. The Magic Research Bureau doesn't have the right to take people into their custody either, so you don't have to worry about that."

"That's a relief."

Captain Ludtink knew more about the law and that bureau than I expected.

Well, he had his own position of authority as a captain and a noble, so it was only natural that he knew about these topics. I just thought of him as a bandit whenever I looked at him, so I couldn't help but be surprised by his breadth of knowledge. My respect for him grew.

Captain Ludtink continued, "I'm glad you want to stay with our unit. I appreciate that. But..." He trailed off there. He scrunched up his face like he'd eaten a bug or something.

Instead, Vice Captain Velrey picked up where he left off. "Medic Risurisu, right now, you essentially have a sword without a sheath."

"What do you mean?"

"You have a weapon you don't know how to use, which increases the chances of you hurting yourself. It's dangerous to have such an intense power."

I gasped at her words. She was right. I had no idea how to use magical energy. Nothing had happened to me yet, but there was no guarantee that I would be safe forever.

"Then what do I do...?"

I couldn't go back to the village now. I had just recently received a response to the letter I'd sent my village healer. The theory that Zara and I came up with was correct. My village had a custom of treating those with lots of magical energy as scapegoats for natural disasters. When the healer determined that I had more magical energy than he'd ever seen before, he knew he had to hide it, which was why he diagnosed me as having none.

I had absolutely no desire to report this development to the village mayor. If he found out about me, he would definitely force me to marry someone else in the village with magical energy.

Before I came to the capital, I would have accepted such an outcome as fate. But ever since I arrived at the royal capital, the things I accepted as common sense began to change. I wouldn't be able to follow the Fore Elf village traditions anymore.

It seemed like my only option was to ask the Magic Research Bureau for help.

"No, I wouldn't recommend that," Captain Ludtink said when I brought it up. "They're all mad in the head over there."

I couldn't help but agree with that opinion. I didn't mention it, but Director Vario Leffra of the Magic Research Bureau really came off as being on the

crazier side. I could see him turning me into a human experiment if he ever captured me.

“Personally, I think you should learn magic. That will help make sure no one takes advantage of you too. I’ll leave it in your hands if you want to tell others about your magical energy or keep it a secret. But unfortunately, I don’t know any sorcerers who could take on a student right now.” Captain Ludtink scowled further as he spoke. On the other hand, Vice Captain Velrey got a pained look on her face.

“The requirements are going to be pretty strict. They have to be able to use magic, but they can’t belong to the Magic Research Bureau. They also have to be accepting of mythical beasts and be good at keeping secrets...”

There was one such person who fit it all. I reached the same conclusion when I consulted with Zara before. The name of that man was Marius Lichtenberger.

Lord Lichtenberger, Liselotte’s father, was the only person I could ask to learn from. When I brought up his name, the captain and vice captain both got complicated looks on their faces. Zara and I probably wore the exact same expressions.

“...That’s not a comfortable option.”

“I agree. But there was a misunderstanding between Lord Lichtenberger and I,” I said.

“Still, I can’t forgive him for raising his hand against you when you did nothing wrong.” Vice Captain Velrey was unusually aggravated. The incident with the Royal Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau had been truly painful for me.

Lord Lichtenberger, considering what he went through in the past, must have been very disturbed back then. I still hadn’t forgiven him for striking me, though. I really didn’t want to see him if I could avoid it. But he’d also healed Amelia’s wounds with magic and made things easier for me to live with a mythical beast in the royal capital. That was all thanks to Lord Lichtenberger.

Considering everything he did, it was probably time to forgive him.

“I think Lord Lichtenberger is the only person I can ask for help,” I said.

The room fell silent again. Everyone had very grim looks on their faces.

“Fine. I’ll go talk to the marquess then,” Captain Ludtink said.

“Thank you very much.”

When I asked him if I could tell Garr, Ulgus, and Liselotte before that, he said it was okay. I bowed my head deeply to Captain Ludtink.

“I’m sorry for all the trouble, but thank you very much for your help.”

“You’re a real handful, all right.”

His response was rather cocky. Vice Captain Velrey gave an awkward smile, her eyebrows drooping.

Now I’d made one step forward. I just didn’t know what to expect after this. For now, all I could do was put in my best efforts.



THE next day, I invited Garr, Ulgus, and Liselotte to lunch. Zara and Amelia joined us too, of course. We gathered in a private room at our usual restaurant.

“I’m so sorry to call you here out of the blue, everyone.”

“It’s fine, Medic Risurisu. I love the food here.” Ulgus remained so cheery. He was a nice boy.

Garr and Liselotte readily agreed too. I was grateful to all of them, including Zara, for coming.

“Oh yeah! I found this at the general store before I came here.” Ulgus presented me with a chocolate-colored ribbon. It was a refined, elegant color.

Zara stood up suddenly and glared at Ulgus. “June, what *is* that?!”

“I thought it would look nice on Amelia.”

“Huh? It’s for Amelia?”

“Yes!”

Ulgus... How surprising of you to buy a ribbon for Amelia. June, by the way, was Ulgus’s first name. Only Zara and Charlotte referred to him by it, so it was easy to forget.

“Don’t you think it would be cute to tie it on her tail?” Ulgus suggested.

“I love that idea,” I said.

“I wanted to thank her for the feather she gave me,” he explained.

“I really appreciate the thought.” I crouched down and showed Amelia the ribbon. “Amelia, Ulgus bought you this ribbon.”

“K-Kreh kreh!”

“You think you can butter me up with a gift?” she asked.

“No, it’s not because he wants to touch you, Amelia. He just thought it would look nice on you.”

“K-Kreeeh!”

Amelia seemed embarrassed once she learned she misunderstood him. *“F-Fine, then I guess I’ll wear it,”* she murmured after that. What a relief.

I went ahead and tied it to her tail.

“Wow! It’s so cute!”

Amelia gave him a triumphant look when Ulgus praised her. I decided I should buy some ribbons too. I wanted to send them to my little sisters, though I also wanted some for myself.



“He says it’s thanks for the feather you gave him the other day,” I told her. “He hung it up on the wall in his room.” Amelia fidgeted shyly when she heard this. “Amelia, why don’t you just forgive Ulgus already?”

“Kreeeh.”

“I don’t hate him, but I don’t want to forgive him either... I just don’t want him to pet me, since it’s embarrassing,” she answered. She was such...a delicate little maiden.

“Ah, I’m sorry about the delay. Let’s eat,” I said.

I opened up the menu to decide what to order. First, I ordered assorted fruit for Amelia. I also got her some honey water from the recently added mythical beast menu. I ordered baked boar-pig wrapped in leaves for myself. Liselotte said she would have the same. Garr ordered grilled three-horned cow meat, Ulgus ordered the meat and veggie special, and Zara ordered boar-pig stew.

Today’s bread had dough that was kneaded with honey. I was so excited to try it.

After a while, the waiter brought us our food.

The boar-pig wraps were made of meat and spices wrapped up in a large leaf then baked in a pan. They were tied up cutely with bows made of string. When I undid the string, the refreshing scent of the leaf wafted up to me. I saw that there were root vegetables and mushrooms mixed in with the meat inside too.

I stuck my knife inside and felt it sink in with no resistance. It was surprisingly tender. I cut a bite-sized piece and brought it to my mouth.

The aroma of the leaves tickled my nose from the inside out, and when I bit down into the meat, I felt the juices ooze out. It was a simple flavor made of basic seasonings sprinkled on top, but it was especially delicious with the sweetness of the vegetables having soaked into the meat.

“I’m surprised. I wouldn’t have thought meat wrapped in leaves tasted so good.”

“Neither did I.” Liselotte was so startled, she mentioned how she shouldn’t look down on commoner food.

The honey bread had a subtle flavor. Biting down on the honey-filled portions caused its rich sweetness to fill my mouth. I got the idea to make tree sap bread sometime in the future. Although, my hands would probably be shaking to cook with an ingredient that cost a gold coin per jar.

As we ate our after-dinner jelly dessert, I was prepared to move on to the main topic, but...

“Slime...” Liselotte murmured quietly at my side.

She was right. Slime was an ingredient in jelly and gelatin desserts. I’d completely forgotten. The others, tough as they were, ate the jelly without any struggle.

“By the way, what ended up happening to that slime factory?”

Ulgus was the one to answer that question of mine.

“I heard they opened back up. Gelatin is popular in foreign countries too, so the economy would take a blow if they stopped producing it.”

“I-I see.”

They’d apparently doubled their workers and applied a barrier around the factory. Those of us who were wrapped up in the escaped slime incident didn’t exactly know how to feel about that.

“Speaking of slimes, we had a visit from the director of the Monster Management Bureau,” Liselotte mentioned.

“You did?”

I asked what he was like. Liselotte described him as a suspicious old man. That was probably the norm for all old men in that field.

“I wonder what he came for,” she said. That was when Garr retrieved a bottle from the pouch on his belt and placed it on the table. “Huh?!”

“Whoa!”

“I can’t believe it!”

“Kreh?”

Inside the bottle was a trembling orange-colored...slime!

“Wait, is this Alexander Lait’s creation that he called ‘Sly’?”

Garr nodded at Ulgus’s question. He explained that once Alexander Lait was arrested, there was no one left to take care of the slime, so they thought it would be best to leave him with the squadron that already had a griffin.

It was unfair that Garr was forced to take care of him. The members of the Monster Research Bureau had departments responsible for different monsters. Those people had no interest in anything that wasn’t their specialty, so no one was willing to take care of Sly.

Sly took up about two-thirds of the jar. He was trembling inside it. Garr also told us that he needed to be fed with a single cup of water three times a day.

Garr took his glass of water, opened the lid to the jar, and poured the entire cup inside. That made the slime tremble even more violently as he absorbed the water. Once he slurped it all up, he let out a burp.

Aside from feeding him, Garr also needed to take him on a walk once per day. He was given a special leash for monsters developed by the Magic Research Bureau. Garr accepted this role because of the special pay granted to him by the Monster Research Bureau.

“But those people sure are rude,” Liselotte said. “How could they push the burden onto you?”

“The one thing you can never ask of those bureau people is common sense.”

The Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau was so peaceful in comparison to the others. They simply loved mythical beasts and did whatever they could to keep them safe. They didn’t make life harder for anyone else.

I also felt that Lord Lichtenberger wasn’t such a bad person after all. The mythical beast menu that was added to this restaurant probably came from the bureau learning that we ate here with Amelia.

Amelia wagged her tail with the ribbon tied around it. “*Isn’t honey water delicious?*” she was asking.

“So, Mell. What did you want to talk about?” Liselotte asked.

“Ah, that’s right.”

We'd gotten carried away with all the slime talk. Despite the long preamble, I needed to tell them about my magical energy.

"You see, I got my true magical energy reading with a measuring tool recently, and it came out as red."

"It *what?!'*" Liselotte stood up with total shock on her face. "A magic tool to suppress magical energy... No, you would need a magic processor equipped to handle red-level energy..."

"I don't own anything so expensive."

"No way...! Mell, are you telling the truth?!"

This was when I learned something shocking.

Most people who possessed large amounts of magical energy were unable to control such power within their bodies. It could do things like worsen their health, set off their temper, and even let loose uncontrollable magic bursts. It had a large effect on them and the people around them.

That was why they were supposed to be equipped with a magic tool or magic processor. Magic tools were tools with spells engraved to bring about blessings, while magic processors were made with unknown technology and were very valuable kinds of magic tools. They were both so expensive that the average commoner would be unlikely to get their hands on one.

"Does that mean you were suppressing your own magical energy?" she asked.

"I don't know. Sometimes I still think the measuring instrument was incorrect." I wasn't able to test it again because Zara's instrument broke.

"Very well. Then can you come to my house and try?" Liselotte requested.

"Don't tell me you want me to talk to Lord Lichtenberger?" I grimaced.

"I do. I believe he'll be more trustworthy than any member of the Magic Research Bureau."

"Ah, but Captain Ludtink said he would talk to him first."

"This could be a matter of life and death. You shouldn't drag your feet."

I decided to accept Liselotte's offer. I was very grateful to hear it, in fact.



THAT was how I ended up paying a visit to Liselotte's house.

We went our separate ways with Garr and Ulgus beforehand, while Zara agreed to join us. Amelia came with us too, of course.

"I'll be praying for a good outcome."

With those words and a bow, Ulgus bid us farewell. Garr also told me to do my best.

Oddly, I was starting to feel nervous. It would be my first time meeting with Lord Lichtenberger in a few months.

We stopped by Captain Ludtink's house to tell him we were heading to Lord Lichtenberger's place. The captain agreed to come with us too. I felt a little guilty, dragging him into this during his time off.

"I want to know about this whole situation too, and it'd be best to try to find a solution as fast as possible," he said. "Lord Lichtenberger actually responded to my letter this evening too. He said he'd be in the royal capital for a month, so we could come visit at any point."

I bowed my head deeply to the generous Captain Ludtink. It was a relief to hear that I wouldn't be interrupting Lord Lichtenberger's schedule.

A carriage from the Lichtenberger house arrived while we were talking. It took us to a townhouse in the center of town. The trip between the two manors took almost no time at all. Our carriage pulled to a stop at the front gates.

"Whoa, what a nice mansion," I said in awe.

"Our country home is even bigger," Liselotte said.

She invited me to come stay with them the next time I had a long vacation.

Nobles spent the social season from winter to spring in the royal capital. For the rest of the time, they lived in their country homes, usually found on the land they governed. Lord Lichtenberger's territory was to the west of the royal capital. His family spent the summers in their cool and pleasant region. Liselotte also told me that they ran a mythical beast sanctuary there with three griffins of their own.

“Father hunts mountain bears too. They’re delicious.”

“Wow, that sounds lovely.”

I was surprised to learn that Lord Lichtenberger hunted. We chatted about these subjects as we entered the front door. There in the entryway was a row of servants who all bowed their heads and announced, “Welcome home, Lady Liselotte.” Then they turned to us and welcomed the rest of our group to the manor.

I’d never had such a large group of people bow to me before. Captain Ludtink remained unphased. He was probably used to this sort of thing. He was a high-class bandit, all right. I needed to learn from his example.

“I’m going to go speak with Father briefly,” Liselotte announced.

“Are you sure you’ll be all right? You told me you two were fighting...”

“I’m just going to apologize. I was in the wrong too, after all. Besides, you’re in danger right now, Mell. This is no time to be stubborn.”

“Liselotte...” I bowed my head again and thanked her.

Zara, Captain Ludtink, and I waited for Lord Lichtenberger to arrive in the parlor. The servants prepared a large cushion for Amelia, which she was curled up in and resting her beak on. Why, exactly, was she receiving better treatment than us? Maybe that was standard at the home of the Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau director.

Next, they brought out an assortment of fruit and honey water. Amelia looked troubled, as she’d only just finished a big lunch. Then the servants brought us some tea and snacks too.

The baked goods appeared to be made with chocolate mixed into the batter and then baked in bell-shaped molds. Despite how full I was, the sweet scent wafting up from them got me curious. I reached out toward the tray.

Each piece was bite-sized, but they were surprisingly heavy despite being so small. I could tell they weren’t the simple kind of baked goods. What secrets could they be holding? I didn’t hesitate to take a bite.

“Mm!!”

The outside was crispy, but the inside was filled with the rich taste of chocolate and the perfect accent of bitterness. All of it was wrapped in the scent of butter. The dough was springy and dense on the inside. Now I knew why it was so heavy. So these were the sweets enjoyed by high society. I was already full, but it was so delicious, I couldn't help but be impressed.

Captain Ludtink didn't even try one. I knew he disliked sweet things.

But they're still so delicious!

Zara looked my way and struck up a conversation. "Melly, do you like these desserts?"

"Yes!"

"I know the recipe. I'll bake you some sometime."

"Wow! Thank you!"

Zara's sweets were good enough to sell at a bakery. I threw my hands up in joy. It was just then that the door to the parlor opened. Finally, it was time to reunite.

"Sorry for the wait."

Liselotte entered first. She took a seat across from me on the sofa. Lord Lichtenberger entered next. The entire mood of the room instantly became tense. His hair, the same purple as Liselotte's, was combed back and he was dressed in well-ironed formalwear. Lord Lichtenberger gave off an air of dignity.

Captain Ludtink and Zara both stiffened. It was like they'd both changed their minds and were back to wanting to kill him. But they already said they were going to let the past stay in the past. Not that I didn't understand how they felt.

I just sort of wished they could look a little nicer when they greeted him.

But Captain Ludtink and Zara weren't the only ones acting up.

"Kreeeeeeh!"

Amelia puffed up her feathers and let out a threatening cry.

The marquess's expression fell. That wasn't at all surprising, considering he'd just been shown hostility by one of his dearly beloved mythical beasts.

Every last one of us fell silent.

It was just so exceedingly awkward. Captain Ludtink looked uncomfortable, but Zara and Amelia looked downright bloodthirsty. Looking just as uncomfortable, Lord Lichtenberger took a seat at Liselotte's side. But that was when another guest of some sort entered the room.

He was a small white animal with round ears and a long torso.

"Here I am! It is I, Album!"

It was the fairy who caused all that trouble in the tree sap forest.

Lord Lichtenberger must have given him a name when he formed their contract. "Album" meant "white" in the ancient language. It was a surprisingly direct name based on the creature's looks.

"Ah! Pancake girl! The pancake girl is here! I request pancakes!"

It appeared he remembered my identity as the girl who made the tree nut pancakes.

Album waddled up to me, but then...

"Kreeeeeh!!"

Amelia grabbed his head with her front paws before he could get to me.

"Urgh! Damn you, griffin, with your beast strength!"

"Kreeeeeh!!"

"It's your fault, Album. Apologize to her."

"Awww! I don't wanna!"

Album let out a cry of disappointment, receiving such orders from the marquess.

"Looks like you've forgotten our contract." Lord Lichtenberger raised his gloved left hand. Inside was likely the seal of their contract.

Album got a hold of himself when Lord Lichtenberger glared at him. His round ears drooped down. Awkwardly, he gave me an apology. *"I-I'm sorryyyy."*

After that, he went and plopped down between Lord Lichtenberger and

Liselotte.

He was only upset about the whole thing for a brief moment. Now Album was grinning at us with a proud look on his face.

“That’s not your seat!”

“How mean!”

Lord Lichtenberger grabbed him by the neck and set him on the ground. Thanks to Album (somehow), the stiff atmosphere in the room had unwound slightly.

I stroked Amelia’s head to calm her down.

At that point, it was finally time to get to the main topic at hand.

Captain Ludtink had only told him that we had something to discuss, but no further details after that. “You see, we’ve come today to discuss Mell Risurisu here...”

Despite his polite manner of speaking, Captain Ludtink’s face remained as stern as ever. Perhaps the rift between him and Lord Lichtenberger ran deeper than I thought. Captain Ludtink gave an explanation in a simple tone of voice.

He revealed my enormous amount of magical energy, the fact that I’d never been trained in it, and how my life would become a lot harder if the Magic Research Bureau found out about me.

“I see. So that’s the situation?”

“Yes. We felt that, as the best healing sorcerer in the city and a friend of mythical beasts, Your Lordship was the only person we could ask for help.”

The room fell silent again once Captain Ludtink was finished. Despite the grim expression on the captain’s face...

“Please, Father...!”

The marquess furrowed his brow upon hearing the plea of his beloved only daughter, Liselotte. I decided to speak up too.

“I really need your help.” When I bowed my head to him, Lord Lichtenberger turned his eyes toward me.

“...Very well. Let’s measure your magical energy first.” When he approached me, Amelia let out another menacing cry.

“It’s okay, Amelia. You’re worrying too much,” I told her.

“Kreeeh!”

She clacked her sharp claws on the ground—a hot-blooded threat that she was willing to strike the marquess. But once I explained the situation to her, she managed to calm down.

Lord Lichtenberger asked me to stand and hold out the palm of my hand. Amelia, still uneasy about him, came to my side and let out a low growl.

“I’m not going to do anything to your master.”

“Kreh!”

“I’ll stake my life on it.”

“Kreh...”

That seemed to convince her. She took a step backwards.

Lord Lichtenberger got on one knee in front of me, removed his glove, and revealed a bracelet on his right wrist. It had a spell engraved on it. I knew it had to be a magic processor.

Once he stroked the spell with his fingers, a faint magic circle began to glow over his palm. He then placed that circle on top of my own hand. It lit up red.

“Uh-huh. Indeed, this is extreme magical energy. You wouldn’t have been able to withstand it if you were human, I’m sure.” He explained that us elves possessed the ability to harbor large amounts of magical energy. That was why I’d been unaffected for so many years. “You don’t need to worry about your magical energy going out of control. That doesn’t apply to you as an elf.”

“Good to know.”

“But if you don’t know how to use your powers, that comes with the risk of having them abused.”

That was what scared me. I had no idea what I was supposed to do.

“For that, I have a suggestion.” Lord Lichtenberger hesitated to continue. I

had no idea what he was going to say.

“What is it?” I asked.

“...Well, I could always teach you how to use magic.”

It was really the best offer I could receive. There was no more skilled magician in the kingdom than Lord Lichtenberger.

“But you might not want me as your teacher.”

I turned back to look at Captain Ludtink. He gave me a firm nod of his head. Liselotte’s face had lit up into a cheerful expression. Zara and Amelia were staring at the ground, clearly less than thrilled with this idea.

“What do you say, Amelia?”

“Kreeeeh.”

“It sounds like there’s no other choice,” she pouted. I hugged Amelia before giving my response. Zara said he would support whatever my decision was.

“Please teach me,” I requested.

“Very well.”

That was how I came to obtain a magic teacher.

We decided to discuss the details at a later date.

He offered to let me move into Count Everhart’s house—the family of his wife. It was the same family that took care of Zara’s mountain cat while he was away on expeditions.

“Well, I did mention you to the lady of the house, Melly, so I think...it’ll work out. Probably, at least,” Zara said.

It sounded like she was a difficult person. I wondered if she would even take a liking to Amelia. I would just have to meet her and talk it out.

My worries had all been cleared up by this encounter. I needed to thank Zara, Captain Ludtink, and Liselotte for coming with me. Lord Lichtenberger was on that list, too, for how he took care of my troubles.

As I was about to leave the parlor, he stopped me. When I turned around, he

was holding out three chocolates wrapped in silver paper. It was the same kind of chocolate Liselotte once gave me. Though he was a man of few words, this gift said everything about Lord Lichtenberger's feelings. I knew he wanted to apologize for what happened between us before.

He probably didn't say anything because he knew I wanted to leave the past in the past. He didn't want to open up old wounds. Silently, I accepted the chocolates. I squeezed them in my palm and bowed my head to him.

"Thank you very much. I look forward to working with you."

Lord Lichtenberger simply nodded his head at me.



TODAY we would be traveling by carriage to a meadow about an hour away from the capital city. Captain Ludtink took the reins while Amelia, Liselotte, and I boarded the carriage. Garr rode a horse to follow us from behind. Vice Captain Velrey, Zara, and Ulgus remained at the barracks. It was our first time going out with these particular members.

Today's goal was to measure Amelia's stamina. While she wasn't fully grown yet, it was getting difficult to transport her in the carriage any longer. Her wings caught on the entrance again today, and we had to push her into the carriage by force. The inside of the passenger section was packed tight. I was told that Amelia would be full-grown within another month or two.

When I looked down at her, she was pecking at her wing with her beak.

"It's okay, Amelia."

"Kreh..."

She'd forgotten to fold her wings back when she entered the door and ended up breaking three feathers on the frame. She wasn't injured, fortunately, but after pulling out the broken feathers, there was a bit of a bald patch. Amelia had been intensely focused on it ever since.

"They grow back fast. It'll be back to normal in three or four days."

"Kreh kreh..."

Amelia was still depressed. I understood how she felt. I would probably be

depressed for a week too if a part of my head went bald.

“She really grew up in the blink of an eye,” Captain Ludtink commented from up front.

“Most mythical beasts don’t raise their young,” Liselotte explained.

“I-Is that right?” I said.

“Yep. That’s why they grow faster than any other animal.”

I learned that some mythical beasts looked after their young for a few days, while others abandoned their eggs as soon as they were laid. It varied from creature to creature. Indeed, Amelia had grown quite large. I estimated she was a bit over three feet tall now. She was big enough to barely fit inside a carriage.

“Mythical beasts are born knowing how to find and eat fruit,” Liselotte added.

“But Amelia didn’t even know how to peel it at first,” I pointed out.

“Were those fruits that don’t grow natively in griffins’ forests?”

“Oh, that would make sense.”

Mythical beasts were born with various pieces of knowledge that allowed them to live independently. Many of them died young when, like Amelia, they were attacked by monsters.

“We don’t have statistics on how many mythical beasts are out there, but eyewitness information says that their populations are plummeting each year, and more and more people are mistaking them for monsters and killing them,” Liselotte said sadly.

It was impossible to tell the difference between a monster and a mythical beast without the proper knowledge. The adventurers’ association slayed monsters, bringing their horns and fangs back for a reward. This started about twenty years ago. While monster populations had dropped significantly, mythical beasts were being wiped out even more than monsters.

“Mythical beasts don’t attack people, but they’re very wary of others, so they’ll bare their fangs to protect themselves if you approach them with a sword. Most people don’t understand that they have those instincts.” Liselotte probably wanted us to learn about the virtues of mythical beasts through

Amelia.

Unlike the Magic Research Bureau and Monster Research Bureau, the Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau had no achievements to speak of yet. That was why they were starting to feel rushed.

“Don’t worry. I’m sure people will come to acknowledge how great mythical beasts are,” I assured her.

“I hope so. Thank you.”

That was why we needed to work together with Amelia. If Amelia became a successful member of the Royal Order, she could probably change the reputation of both mythical beasts and the bureau.

We arrived at the meadow as we chatted. Here we would test Amelia’s flying ability and stamina. Amelia seemed ready to give it her all. I hoped she would do her best, so long as she didn’t overwork herself.

First, we wanted to see how far she could fly.

“Be careful, Amelia. The wind is very strong,” I warned.

“Kreh!”

The wind in this meadow was powerful all year long due to it being a flat area of land alongside a mountain. They’d chosen this place on purpose to test Amelia’s flying ability.

Liselotte stared intensely at Amelia so that she wouldn’t miss anything for the records she was taking. Her eyes meant business. I knew she probably wouldn’t respond if I tried to talk to her now.

Amelia spread her wings and lifted off into the air. But that was the exact moment of a particularly strong gust.

“Whoa! Amelia!”

I was worried that she might get carried away by the wind, but Amelia didn’t waver.

Captain Ludtink squinted in the sunlight to watch her efforts. “Looks like she’s grown up nice and sturdy.”

“Th-That’s good to hear.”

Amelia remained stable in the air the entire time. But there was more to learn about her flight. The next test was to see if she could fly while carrying a bag filled with rocks. This was to measure her ability to fly with me on her back.

“Amelia, don’t force yourself if it’s too heavy, okay?” I stressed.

“Kreh!”

The weight of the bag was roughly one-third of mine. Amelia, however, was saying that she was completely fine with this test. She took off once again, this time wearing the bag. It was clear...that she could fly without any trouble in this state.

The next bag we fastened on her back was roughly half my weight.

“I can’t believe you can carry something so heavy,” I said in awe.

Amelia had lived a sheltered life with nothing heavy to carry until now. I was nervous.

“Kreh kreh.”

“It’s not heavy,” said Amelia now that she had the bag on her back.

She soared around nimbly as if to tell me I had no reason to worry. Each flap of her white wings sent her fluidly into a turn in mid-air. She flew beautifully.

Finally, it was time for her to wear a bag of rocks equal to my weight. As Captain Ludtink lifted up the bag to fasten it to her, he felt the need to make a rude remark.

“Are you really this light? Are you sure you didn’t lie about your weight?”

“How rude. It’s accurate,” I huffed.

“Weren’t you a little heavier that time I lifted you up?”

“I-I’d only just joined the unit back then.”

I lost weight after going on so many expeditions. Garr lifted both me and the bag up, one at a time, to see if we were roughly equal.

“Then go ahead and lift me up.” I spread my arms so that Captain Ludtink

could pick me up next.

“...Fine.” The captain lifted me up into the air like I weighed nothing, but then...

“Gyaaaaaah!” I screamed.

“Wh-What?!”

“I-I got scared when I saw your face so close, so I screamed!”

“Shut it!” He put me back down on my feet. Somewhere in this process, the captain’s eyes had teared up. “Fine, you feel like the same weight as the bag.”

“See? I told you.”

“Whatever.”

“Don’t just say ‘whatever!’”

“I’m sorry.”

“There. That’s better.”

He better not do it again.

It was time to start the experiments again. Captain Ludtink attached the bag to Amelia’s back.

“Don’t overdo it.”

“Kreh!”

Despite my racing heart, Amelia was able to glide through the air.

“So she doesn’t have any trouble with this weight. Looks like she can carry you easily, Risurisu,” the captain assessed.

“That’s so wonderful...” I pulled Amelia into a hug when she landed again. “You’re amazing, Amelia.”

“Kreh!”

She let out a proud cry. I was so relieved to see that she didn’t seem worn out.

The next task at hand was to measure her stamina. Garr would ride his horse

and see how long Amelia, with a bag of rocks worth half my weight on her back, could keep up.

“Be sure not to overexert yourself, Amelia.”

“Kreh!”

“I’ll show you what I’m made of,” she said with an intense look.

“Okay, get a move on, Garr.”

Captain Ludtink was watching closely too. Together with Liselotte, our remaining group observed Amelia’s best efforts.

The three of us stood in a row. A cool breeze blew past us.

“...I sure am hungry.” Captain Ludtink muttered to himself. I reached into my bag and silently handed him a cookie.

“I want something salty.”

I obeyed this request and retrieved a jar of pickled veggies.

“I want something warm. Meat, if you’ve got it.”

“I only brought bread, cheese, roasted beans, jerky, and pickled vegetables today.”

Although, I *did* have my pot. Not that I planned on cooking out here, since we were supposed to return relatively soon.

“If you’d like meat, please hunt one of the mountain rabbits hopping around the field,” I said.

“Fine.” Captain Ludtink asked me to lend him Gula, my magic pole weapon.

“What do you need it for?” I raised my eyebrow at him.

“I’m gonna hit rabbits with it.”

“Whaaat...?”

He told me that before, when he hunted that wild bird, he’d utilized the ancient technique of sneaking up to it and beating it with a blunt object.

I watched the captain leave to chase down his prey. A few minutes later, he appeared ready to strike. He quieted his movements, approached the mountain

rabbit, and sent Gula crashing down on it as hard as he could.

One blow seemed to have done the trick. Captain Ludtink lifted the rabbit up and showed it to me. The captain gave me a proud look, although his face was splattered with blood, which made the gesture much more frightening.

Liselotte let out a shriek when she saw not Captain Ludtink but the dead rabbit. Then her eyes went even wider when she saw the blood-drenched Gula.

I knew it must be a shock for the young lady with a sheltered upbringing. However, the rabbit was a perfect specimen. It was the biggest mountain rabbit I'd ever seen, appearing plump and delicious. I didn't waste any time tying the legs together to begin cleaning it.

"Huh? You're going to clean it here?" Liselotte asked me.

"That's the plan..."

This appeared to be Liselotte's first time witnessing an animal cleaning. Her face was twitching and draining of all color.

"It'll be pretty bloody, so please look away."

"N-No, I'm all right."

There was no reason to put herself through this, but she was determined to watch the process.

Captain Ludtink held the rabbit upside down by the feet for me. I inserted my knife. First, I cut into its neck to drain the blood.

I heard Liselotte gulp.

Then I began to remove the skin. I skinned its thighs, torso, shoulders, back, and head.

"Y-You're eating the head too?" she stammered, sounding queasy.

"It's delicious in a soup."

Liselotte was starting to get tears in her eyes.

I decided to make hamburger steak today by using my knife to mince up the rabbit meat. I left the meat-mincing to Captain Ludtink. I also asked Liselotte to mash the roasted beans in a mortar.

While they worked on that, I went to pick some medicinal garlic.

Then I added Liselotte's bean paste to Captain Ludtink's ground rabbit meat and seasoned it with salt, pepper, and thinly cut strips of garlic leaves. Once I'd mixed it up enough to turn it sticky in texture, I molded it into patties. I grilled them in oil using my pot. Finally, I would put them in bread to make delicious—

“Hey. Grill the bread up extra crispy.”

“Okay, okay.”

I decided to grill the bread as requested by the condescending Captain Ludtink. Liselotte preferred soft bread, so her sandwich didn't need any adjustments. I also preferred ungrilled bread. Garr liked it crispy, so I made sure to grill his thoroughly too. I placed the steaks on top of the bread and topped them with thin-sliced cheese and pickled veggies, then covered the pot with its lid to cook them.

My rabbit hamburger steaks were complete.

Garr and Amelia returned at this point. I learned that Amelia had more than enough stamina to keep up. Now that everyone was together, it was time for lunch.

I fed Amelia some honey water and dried fruit. She gobbled them down, proving how hungry she must have been.

Liselotte stared down at the hamburger steak like she didn't know what she was looking at. “I've never had bread with this ‘hamburger’ meat inside before.”

“I hear they sell it at bakeries in the royal capital. It's a popular dish.” I decided I wanted to try making it after I heard about the dish from Zara. “They say it's a recipe that came from a foreign land.”

“I see.”

I said my prayer and began to eat.

I opened my mouth wide to take a big bite of the bread. Immediately, I felt the fat ooze out onto my tongue. The seasonings did a great job of hiding any odor. I enjoyed the sensation of chewing on the delicious, savory meat. The hint

of the beans in each bite was appetizing as well.

“Do you like it, Liselotte?” I asked.

Liselotte was hesitating, as she was used to eating her meals with a knife and fork, but she decided to tough it out when she saw everyone else eating their sandwiches.

“Ah... I-It’s good. I’m surprised.”

Despite the lack of any sauce, the umami flavor of the meat was enough to stand on its own. I was glad she came around.

Garr reported his findings to us after lunch. Amelia was able to keep up with the horse flawlessly. Her speed didn’t change, even when equipped with a bag equal to my weight along the way. I would probably be able to complete expeditions on Amelia’s back soon. I was so looking forward to it.



SLY, the slime entrusted to us by the Monster Research Bureau, appeared to have grown very fond of Garr at some point. When Sly was released from his jar, he would happily crawl up Garr’s arm, hop on his shoulder, and nuzzle his cheek. The adorable smooth, orange slime had round eyes and a mouth like a cat. He was small enough to fit in our palms.

Sly also stopped approaching those of us with magical energy like Liselotte and me. He was glued to Garr at all times. He also obeyed Garr’s orders even outside of the magic jar. Sly could express his thoughts by extending his “arms” and gesturing with them too.

Surprisingly, Amelia and the slime also got along well.

Sly trembled and Amelia gave responses of “Kreh kreh.” I couldn’t tell if they were having a conversation or not. She even recently gave him a feather she lost. Sly stuck it in his “head” as if he wanted to look more stylish, spinning around happily with his new accessory.

The members of the Second Expeditionary Squadron enjoyed watching over the heartwarming Sly.

Even the Monster Research Bureau seemed perplexed by this outcome. Their

members took turns coming to observe us. The result was our second squadron's barracks being filled with old men on a daily basis.





TODAY'S job was to split up and work on our respective tasks.

The rest of the members trained while Liselotte participated in a sorcerer's education course. Amelia and the bottled Sly stayed in the captain's office. I sat at his desk to carry out our bookkeeping.

Charlotte, as lively as ever, was getting all her cleaning done.

As always, a member of the Monster Research Bureau was there to check on Sly. His arrival startled me—there had been no warning in advance.

I told him to get permission before showing up, but he begged me for just a short observation. I didn't really want to be alone in the office with an older man. But he didn't seem willing to listen to my complaint.

"Um... No, you really can't be here. Please get permission before you come."

He ignored me and continued to stare intensely into the bottle. This man was in his late thirties. The researcher wore foggy glasses and a dirty white coat.

Amelia had been crying out of concern over the researcher's presence. I'd assume that, as someone here to observe, he wouldn't think of doing anything bad...

"Harrumph!"

"What?!"

With a strange cry, the researcher grabbed Sly's bottle and ran to open the office door.

"Sly! Wh-Whaaaaat?!"

"KREEEEH!!"

Amelia let out a piercing cry and chased after him.

I never expected him to commit theft right before my eyes. I had no idea what to do. I knew I wouldn't be able to catch up to him if I went running now. The correct thing to do was report to Captain Ludtink. I stood up, grabbed my magic pole Gula, and raced to the training grounds.

I reported to him about the arrival of the bureau's researcher, his refusal to listen to me, and his theft of Sly.

"He did what?!" Captain Ludtink leaned closer to me with a blood-chilling look on his face. I told him that Amelia was currently chasing the old man.

"I'm so sorry. I should have stopped him."

"We can talk about that later. Where's Amelia right now?"

"Um..."

"Mell! Try touching your contract seal. It will tell you where Amelia is."

When I turned around, an exhausted Liselotte appeared. She must have followed me after she saw me running down the barrack hallways. Her face was bright red and her body shook with her deep breaths.

"If you have a contract...with your mythical beast..." she panted, "the seal connects you...and you can share...information. T-Try it...yourself..."

"A-All right." I touched the seal on the back of my hand. Instantly, I saw a flash of Amelia's vision. "Whoa! No way!!"

I saw an ice pebble right before my eyes. I knew it had to be what Amelia was seeing.

"What happened, Risurisu?" Captain Ludtink asked.

"It appears that the Monster Research Bureau member is a sorcerer, so he's attacking Amelia with ice pebbles."

"Where are they?"

"I think they're near the courtyard passageway."

"Got it." Captain Ludtink barked out orders. "Velrey, Garr, you two get to that passageway right away. Try to capture the guy unharmed if you can. I'm counting on you."

"Understood."

Vice Captain Velrey sheathed the swords in her hands and took off running. Garr nodded before chasing after her.

“Zara, go report to the Monster Research Bureau. Risurisu, what was his name?”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t know.” I described the man instead.

“Fine. Zara, get a move on.”

“Roger.” Zara headed to the bureau.

“Ulgus, circle around to the second floor and take a position to capture this guy. You have permission to use arrows with an anesthetic or sleeping drugs on them.”

“Under what circumstances?”

“You can use them if any other member can’t fight anymore. I’ll take responsibility for everything. Just don’t hit any vital organs.”

“Got it.”

Next, he ordered Liselotte to report this incident to the general commander of the expeditionary squadrons.

Finally, it came down to me.

“Let’s go.”

“Huh?”

I felt my body get lifted up into the air. At first, I thought he was going to carry me like luggage, but instead, Captain Ludtink took off running, dragging me in the air behind him.

“Gyaaaah!”

“Shut up!”

“But it’s so scawwy!”

I bit my tongue. The captain told me to grit my teeth.

Five minutes after my forced, violent journey, we arrived at the courtyard passageway.

“...Whoa!”

“What a mess.”

The dirt in the courtyard had been hollowed out and trees were tipped over. All of them were next to masses of ice—proof of the magical origin of these wrecks.

A group of knights had gathered due to all the commotion.

Vice Captain Velrey and Garr were facing off against the researcher. Amelia was crouching low to the ground a bit further away. She didn't look injured from what I could tell.

"What should we do, Captain?"

"Well, we obviously can't have a huge battle in a small place like this. We just have to leave it to Garr, Velrey, and Amelia."

"O-Oh no..."

I decided that, while still being carried by Captain Ludtink, I would simply watch over the situation. With his back to the wall, the Monster Research Bureau member seemed to have realized that he was in real trouble. His next move was something completely ridiculous.

"I-If you get any closer...I-I'm gonna smash this slime!!"

A murmur ran through the crowd.

The knights watching the situation all whispered things like "No, not Sly..." and "How evil to take little Sly as a hostage!"

Garr had been taking Sly on daily walks, so I figured these knights must have found comfort in the sight of the simple, jiggly little creature.

Vice Captain Velrey sheathed Avaritia, her twin blades, and Garr stuck Ira, his spear, into the ground. With their weapons out of the picture, the old man climbed up a nearby tree and began to shout for the knights to leave.

"Y-Yeah! Get back! All of you! Get out of here! If you don't, I'll crush this slime's bottle!!"

It was an absurd demand. But just as I thought that...a magic circle formed around Garr.

"What the hell is that?"

With those words from Captain Ludtink, trees suddenly shot out of the magic circle. Their leaves grew outward to encircle their surroundings and block the vision of the researcher.

“Whoa!!”

“Kreeeeh!!”

Amelia didn’t waste a moment in jumping into the air. She circled the tree and smacked the researcher’s hand with her tail. Her whip-like attack had perfect accuracy.

“Owww!!”

The researcher dropped Sly’s bottle, which Amelia gracefully caught in her beak while still in mid-air.

“Well done, Amelia!” I exclaimed.

“Way to get the job done.”

The situation was resolved quickly after that. Garr scaled the tree with ease and took the researcher into custody.

“D-Don’tcha get so violent! I’m sorry, yeh?!”

Is that a different accent? The Monster Research Bureau member begged for salvation with unfamiliar pronunciation.

Silently, Garr jumped from the tree with the man in his arms.

“Gyaaah!”

The researcher was officially in the custody of the Royal Order.

I was downright astonished by the whole incident.

But an hour later, I learned an even more shocking truth. That man was neither a member of the Monster Research Bureau nor the Magic Research Bureau either.

So just who was he, and why did he try to take Sly?

We were told that he refused to answer any questions. It seemed like this case was going to go unsolved. The members of the Monster Research Bureau

and our own squadron were the ones to clean up the courtyard. We filled up the holes in the ground and turned the downed trees into firewood.

Sly was glued to Garr now that he'd been rescued. It wasn't a metaphor—he'd literally shrunk into a long, thin state and was clinging to Garr's chest.

"By the way, Garr, what was that magic circle that showed up around you?"

Garr pointed at Ira, his magic spear.

He explained that when Sly was taken hostage, he felt an anger inside of him like he'd never experienced before. Before he knew it, a black mist was coming out of his spear.

"That weapon must be a magic tool," Liselotte murmured to herself as she filled in a hole in the ground. "I think some sort of spell activates when you're overcome by the emotion the weapon is named after."

I see. Garr's weapon, Ira, meant "Wrath" in the ancient language. Garr had been enraged when the man threatened to send Sly shattering against the ground.

By the way, Captain Ludtink's magic sword was "Superbia" for pride, Vice Captain Velrey's twin magic swords were "Avaritia" for greed, Ulgus's magic bow was "Acedia" for sloth, Zara's magic ax was "Luxuria" for lust, and Liselotte's magic staff was "Invidia" for envy. Finally, my magic pole, Gula, meant gluttony. What was going to happen to my weapon when my appetite flared up?

I wanted to see the effects, but also, I sort of didn't.

Interlude: Charlotte's House-Sitting Adventures and the Sweet Reward

MY hometown burned down in a fire. Then I was caught by a slave trader and put in a tiny cage. I was so scared. I didn't know what was going to happen to me.

But that was when I met Mell. She fed me delicious food when I was really hungry. Even Amelia, the "bird" that always accompanies her, tried to cheer me up, though I didn't understand her.

Mell was the reason I was saved.

After that, I was taken in by the knights. There I studied the local language and learned to work as a maid. Once I was good enough at my job, they sent me to the Second Expeditionary Squadron where Mell worked. I was so, so happy to see Mell and Amelia again! I thanked God, even though I'd stopped believing in Him until now.

The people in the Second Expeditionary Squadron were all just as kind as Mell.

First, there was Captain Bandit. He had a scary face, but he praised me and sometimes even snuck me sweets. Big Sister Anna was always nice. She let me talk to her about whatever I wanted. Papa Garr's ears looked just like my dad's ears. I felt kind of nostalgic when I saw him.

Mama Zara smelled nice and his smile made me happy. June was always grinning. He also asked me if I needed help with anything. Liselotte invited me to drink tea with her. She was fun to talk to. Amelia cheered me up with her cries of "Kreh kreh!"

Then there was Mell—my very best friend. I had so much fun with her.

They were all knights who went out to different lands and battled monsters.

"We'll be back soon, Charlotte."

“Bye-bye, Mell.”

My squadmates were heading on an expedition today. I waved goodbye as they left.

It was another sunny day in the royal capital. The forest I grew up in was very misty and always cloudy. The sun almost never came out like this.

Mell called it laundry weather. That made me remember my job. I couldn't just stand around and wave goodbye. I had my own tasks I needed to complete.

First, I gathered the barracks' curtains, tablecloths, towels used in training, and other items. I set them all next to the well. Then I brought a big bucket and washboard from the storage room to clean them with. In my beastfolk village, we only scrubbed clothes in the river. But this land used soap.

Rubbing cloths against the washboard made dirt come out right away. I was shocked by this groundbreaking tool. But I heard there was something even better than a washboard. The squadrons with many members had something called a “washing machine” that ran on magic stones. It washed and even dried the laundry with magic!

Just what was it like? I was so very curious.

Bubbles from the soap started to form as I scrubbed. They smelled so good. I loved them so much. I cupped the bubbles in my hand to make a circle, blew into them, and watched a big soap bubble appear. Mell taught me how to do this.

I wrung out the washed laundry and hung it up on a pole.

But then I heard footsteps behind me. It wasn't a squadmate. It was another knight.

I hid in a bush so that she wouldn't find me.

The knight jogged toward the barracks. She was around Mell's age. Her hair was black like Big Sister Anna and she wore it tied back like a long animal tail. Her skin was a healthy tan color and she carried a stack of papers.

June told me that the youngest knights had to do jobs like hers. June was the paper carrier of the Second Expeditionary Squadron.

The knight who came here brought the unit papers every two or three days. I remembered her face and her scent. She talked to me once, but I wasn't confident I could talk back, so I just ran away.

After that, I kept hiding whenever she came.

She looked troubled as she stood in front of the locked barracks. She must not have known that they were away on an expedition. But Captain Bandit left me in charge of receiving documents. I needed to go take them from her.

But I was scared, since I only ever talked to the members of the Second Expeditionary Squadron. What if she laughed at me...? I was so nervous.

I felt my ears slump down. I was a big, giant coward.

But everyone at the Royal Order was kind.

It wasn't just the Second Expeditionary Squadron. The knight who took me in never scared me, either. That meant the female knight was probably safe too.

I mustered up all my courage and left my bush.

Approaching her slowly, I quieted all my sounds...no, wait, that's for hunting. I didn't want to scare her, so I called out from a distance.

"Excuse me. Are those Captain Bandit's papers?"

The knight turned around with a startled expression. I still scared her in the end.

"Um, he tell me to take papers for him."

"Ah, is that right...? Thank you then." She ran to me and handed over the papers. I told her the words that Mell said to use when I received papers.

"Thank you for your hard work."

"Thanks. You too." The knight was smiling, so I smiled back just like her. Then she left the barracks.

It actually went okay in the end. Phew!

After that, I went inside the barracks through the back door and brought the papers to Captain Bandit's office. Then I put a big rock I found outside on top of them so that they wouldn't blow away.

“Okay. All done!”

Somehow, I felt like I’d completed a big job.



I finished the laundry. That meant it was time to clean the rooms.

I opened the window in the breakroom all the way to bring fresh air in while I hit the couch to get the dust out. Then I sorted the books on the bookshelf by height and lined them up in order based on volume number.

Next up was polishing the floor. I swept it with a wooden broom, wiped it down with a damp cloth, and polished it with beeswax to make the wood shiny. Once I finished the breakroom and office, I poured water on the stone floor of the kitchen. This one needed scrubbing with a brush. It was very hard to get up all the dust and soot from the stove that had stained the floor.

I scrubbed and scrubbed as hard as I could.

It was already afternoon by the time I finished. I ate the lunchbox the cafeteria lady at the maids’ dorm made me. She did this for me every day after I told her that I didn’t want to go to the crowded cafeteria. Today’s lunch was bread with meat inside, boiled sausage and potatoes, and a big round forest apple. Every part was delicious.

I spent the afternoon making the preserved food that Mell asked for. I made biscuits and boiled apples with sugar.

Along the way, it became nighttime. I forgot all about the laundry. I raced to go get it in a panic. Everything was dry and smelled like nice soap. The yellowed curtains and tablecloth with a red wine stain had become completely white again. I was happy that they got so clean.

Then I returned to the barracks, hung up the curtains, and laid out the tablecloths. I closed all the windows in the barracks and locked them up next. Everything was nice and safe. Once I finished that, I took my apron off and put it in the laundry basket.

All my work for the day was done. Just then, my stomach started to growl. I ran all the way to the maids’ dorm.

“Welcome back, Charlotte.”

“I’m home!”

The old ladies in the cafeteria greeted me with smiles when I came in.

“Thank you for the lunchbox! It was delicious!”

“Was it, now? That’s good.”

There weren’t many maids at this time of day, so I could eat without getting scared. The other jobs apparently had something called “overtime.”

“Charlotte, here’s bread fresh out of the oven!”

“Wow!”

She placed a big, plump piece of bread on my plate. Then I got a bowl of steaming hot soup with lots of ingredients and a meat skewer. Every meal here was like a feast. We could never eat such great food in my hometown. We were all poor, and sometimes could only eat one meal a day. I really felt so lucky. I survived the scary things, and now I get to live around so many nice people.

“Here.”

“Huh?”

The cafeteria lady gave me a slice of cake as an after-meal dessert.

“That’s a special treat since you worked so hard today.”

“Wow! Thank you!”

The triangular slice of cake had a layer of white cream on the outside. The inside was made of layers of sponge cake and raspberry purée.

Excited, I stuck my fork into the cake.

The raspberries were very sour, but they were perfectly balanced when eaten with the frosting. The cake itself was fluffy and delicious. I felt so full of happiness as I ate that cake. I thanked the cafeteria ladies again and returned the plate.

Everyone around me was always so nice. Someday, I hoped to repay their kindness. That was why I did my very best each and every last day.

Chapter 7: Emergency Ration Lunch with Mell, Her Master, and Album

I had the day off today. I was strangely tired, so I knew I would spend the day lazing around...no, that wouldn't do. I made plans with Lord Lichtenberger already. I pulled my heavy body out of bed and stretched.

"Kreeeh."

Amelia was already awake, so I fed her some of the fruit supplied to me by the Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau. I was going to enjoy a luxurious meal at a cafe...no, I had no time for that, so I simply ate a breakfast of bread, cheese, and fruit juice.

I braided my hair and dressed in the hemp shirt and pants I wore in the Fore Elf village, just in case my clothes got torn up. Then I put on a black cloak with a hood. Putting on a pointy hat and carrying a staff with this outfit might actually make me look like a real sorcerer. I couldn't help but think about that sort of thing because Lord Lichtenberger was going to teach me magic today.

Being able to use healing magic was my ultimate goal, but would I even get that far? The question left me feeling nervous. My stomach started to cramp up when I thought about how much Lord Lichtenberger was going to teach me. But things could get very bad if I didn't learn how to control the magical energy inside me. I needed to push through it.

"Amelia, we're going to Lord Lichtenberger's house today."

"Kreeeh..." Amelia let out a displeased cry when she heard that name.

"It's all right. I'm certain that he's a kind person normally." I really hoped that was the case. My feelings permeated my words.

I packed a quill pen, ink pot, parchment, and emergency rations—dried fruit, biscuits, jerky, roasted beans, and bottled fruit juice. I wondered if I needed a weapon or anything like that, but all I had on hand was a knife. Just to be safe, I

also packed my pot in case I needed it as a shield.

Now I was all ready to go.

As I was considering whether I should get into a shared passenger carriage to reach Lord Lichtenberger's house, a breathtaking four-horse coach pulled up to meet me. I couldn't believe it. I was very grateful for it.

We spent ten minutes traveling by carriage until we arrived at the Lichtenberger estate. Liselotte greeted me at the marble entrance to the mansion.

"Welcome, Mell. You too, Amelia."

A row of servants stood behind her. I really felt like there were more than last time.

D-Don't tell me they came out to see Amelia?

As I trembled in place, I suddenly heard the footsteps of someone coming down the stairs. The servants instantly parted to clear an area at the bottom of the staircase. The person who arrived was none other than...

"Ah, Your Lordship!"

...a stern-faced old man...no, it was Lord Lichtenberger. I was shocked that he came all the way down to greet me at the entryway. Naturally, his eyes were fixed on Amelia. The man was nothing if not a lover of mythical beasts.

"Album's here too!" Album, the mischievous fairy we captured on the previous expedition, stuck his head out. *"Oh, if it isn't the pancake girl! C'mon, gimme some of those pancakes!"*

"KREEEEH!!"

"GYAAAAH!"

Amelia stomped down on Album, pinning him with her foot. I told her to release the creature, since I felt a bit bad for him.

"What are you making a fuss for?"

"B-But..."

The marquess glared at Album before turning to face me.

“Mell Risurisu. Come with me. Just you.”

Before I could even react, Amelia beat me to the punch.

“Kreh, kreh kreh! Kreeeh!”

“Don’t do anything weird with her when you’re alone, got it?!” screamed Amelia.

“It’s all right, Amelia. I’m just studying magic,” I assured her.

“Kreh...”

“Besides, Album will be there too, so there’s nothing to worry about.”

“Huh?”

I picked up Album from his place at my feet and told Amelia to play with Liselotte and the maids.

Lord Lichtenberger took heavy strides down the hallway. I had to jog a little to keep up with him. As I wondered where we were going, we suddenly arrived at a backdoor to the house. Lord Lichtenberger donned the hat and cloak given to him by a servant.

“Let’s go.”

“G-Go where?”

“The forest.”

Only able to get the most basic information out of him, the three of us boarded his carriage together.

“Why do I have to go too...?” Album, having been forced to join the magic lesson, was grumbling from his spot on my lap.

“...Would you like some roasted beans?” I offered.

“What, really?” His face immediately went from annoyed to overjoyed as he turned to look up at me. Once I took five roasted beans out of the jar in my bag, he looked so pleased to dig in. *“Yaaay! These roasted beans have the perfect amount of salt!”*

I was surprised he understood things like amounts of salt. He was a

gluttonous little fairy indeed.

“Please behave yourself once you’ve finished, okay?” I requested.

“*Okay!*” Album sat still and quiet after finishing the beans. I was glad this fairy was able to listen to me.

Lord Lichtenberger sat with his arms folded and his brow furrowed. He didn’t move a muscle. It was kind of scary, so I decided to look at him as little as possible.

We appeared to have arrived at our destination two hours later. The sight outside my window was that of a dense forest.

“Now we walk for a bit.”

“Okay.”

Lord Lichtenberger held a staff in his hand and proceeded to cast a spell on Album and me. “Fortune be with us. May all evil beings turn their eyes from these bodies.”

A magic circle formed at the tip of his staff, and for a split second, I felt a warm, white light engulf me.

“What is this, Your Lordship?”

“Just a spell to repel monsters.”

“Wow, amazing!”

I’d just learned that Lord Lichtenberger could use such a spell. This could be nothing other than high magic. He really wasn’t just a mythical beast-loving old man, after all.

Just as I thought we were ready to head out, Lord Lichtenberger grabbed a long, narrow gun from his driver. What could it be for?

When he noticed my eyes on him, the marquess explained, “This is for animals.” He told me that the forest was full of wild animals, so he carried the gun on him to take them out if we happened to run into one. “Monster repellent only works on monsters. It doesn’t affect wild animals.”

“I see.”

Animals were dangerous in their own right. It was better to be prepared than not.

We finally entered the forest at this point. The three of us silently proceeded down the small animal trail. The sky was masked inside of this forest by the leaves overhead, making the area pretty dark. I wondered what on earth he was going to teach me in a place like this.

But just then, I heard rustling from a nearby bush. A giant wild bird flew out right in front of us.

“Whoa!”

“Gyah!”

A loud bang rang out as we screamed. Feathers went flying everywhere, and the bird sank to the ground. It looked like Lord Lichtenberger had shot it for us.

“Th-Thank you.”

“It’s nothing.”

Lord Lichtenberger crouched down to cut open its stomach, remove the organs, cut the head off, and drain the blood. I could tell he knew what he was doing. I remembered Liselotte telling me that her father liked to hunt. But I knew his aim must be pretty good if he was able to shoot a flying bird.

However...

“Eek!”

“Eeeeeek!”

Blood suddenly gushed from the bird and sprayed all over Lord Lichtenberger’s face. I could hardly find the words to express how terrifying he looked in that state. Album and I immediately grabbed hold of each other out of sheer terror.

After we walked for a bit longer, we arrived at a spring with clear water that sparkled like a sapphire.

“How beautiful...”

I could hardly believe such sunlight managed to pierce the otherwise dark

forest. It was a mysterious area that felt like something out of a fantasy world.

“This pond will read the quality of your magical energy,” Lord Lichtenberger explained.

“Wow, I never knew such a place existed.”

“The Lichtenberger family discovered this place. There’s usually a barrier up to prevent entry.”

“Wow...!” I couldn’t believe he had brought me somewhere so important. “Excuse me, Lord Lichtenberger, but what does the quality of magical energy mean?”

“That would be...” Lord Lichtenberger grabbed Album and dunked his tail in the spring water.

“Gyaaaah! I’m all wet! Poor little Album got his tail all wet!”

“Shut up.” As soon as the marquess scolded him, ripples formed in the spring water and began to glow faintly.

“Whoa...!”

The spring turned a beautiful green color. It appeared that magical energy retained an inherent attribute. Liselotte’s magic was specialized for fire spells, so the water turned red when she touched it.

“Green energy means a specialization in healing magic,” Lord Lichtenberger said.

“I see. So if I touch the water, I’ll find out the quality of my own magical energy.”

“Right.”

I wasted no time in touching my fingers to the water. Ripples formed on the surface and brought forth a light. But the water lit up much brighter than I expected. I immediately had to shut my eyes.

“Whoa! So bright!”

“Gyaaaah! My eyes! My eyyyyyees!!”

Lord Lichtenberger grabbed my hand and pulled it out of the spring water.

That made the light die down again.

“L-Lord Lichtenberger, what color was the light?”

“Green...”

“Really?!”

That meant that I might be able to use healing magic too. But the marquess had a grim look on his face for some reason.

“Um, is something wrong?”

“No, I’ve just never heard of such a strong light before... It must get stronger the more magical energy you have...”

I didn’t know the light expressed the quantity of energy too. Lord Lichtenberger seemed shocked by the amount I possessed.

“It’s even higher than when I measured it,” he said.

“I-I see...”

“Man-made instruments aren’t always completely accurate. This spring is far more precise than anything else.” This time, Lord Lichtenberger himself stuck his fingers in the spring. The water turned to a beautiful emerald color that glowed and sparkled. “This is my unique energy and its quantity.”

The light was very strong, but not so bright that I had to look away.

“As you can see, this makes it clear that you have even more magical energy than I do.”

“Wh-Whaaat?!”

“Healing magic is a miraculous power that utilizes magical energy to heal the sick and injured. They say that the more of that magical energy you have, the better you’ll be at using your magic.”

How could I possibly have more magical energy than Lord Lichtenberger, the top healing magic user in the royal capital?

“Of course, I’m not going to tell anyone about this,” Lord Lichtenberger assured me. “Nor should you.”

“I-I understand.”

With my magical energy quality and quantity now measured, it was time for him to teach me a very basic healing spell.

Two hours later...

“Aaaaargh!!”

I clutched my head and collapsed to the ground. Normal sorcerers were supposed to be able to master this spell within thirty minutes, but I couldn't get it to activate at all.

“You don't usually see people struggling on the first one,” Lord Lichtenberger said coolly.

“Shouldn't you be telling me that most people don't master it right away?”

“I just told you the truth.”

“Urgh...”

He was right. This was how it was when I studied healing magic as a child too. For whatever reason, I just couldn't get spells to activate.

“Maybe your magical energy has been sealed away by someone,” he guessed.

“Whaaat...?” It was such an unexpected conclusion. My body went limp and my stomach let out a growl. “I know! Lord Lichtenberger, let's eat the bird you killed!”

I had my pot with me and everything, even though I only brought it as a shield. What a twist that I would get to use it as a pot... No, it's a cooking utensil in the first place, not a shield.

I gathered rocks from our surroundings and built a simple stove. Then I plucked the feathers from the dead bird and washed the blood clean with water. When I found a feather I couldn't remove, I used fire to warm it first. I cleaned the inside of the bird, then cut the meat into small pieces and grilled them in my hot pan. As for seasonings, the only thing I added was the salt that gathered beneath the roasted beans. I would let the natural flavor of the meat be the main star.

Next, I took large leaves that were nearby to use as plates, stacking them with the grilled meat, biscuits, and cheese. It turned out to be a pretty good meal. You could hardly tell that it was made with emergency rations I kept on hand.

“I’ll call this...um...the emergency ration special!” I proclaimed.

“*Woohoo!*” Album was hopping up and down with glee with both hands in the air.

“Let’s eat.” I handed Lord Lichtenberger one of the leaves too.

“I’m sorry that I don’t have a knife or fork...” he said.

Album grabbed the meat with his hands and took a big bite. “*Wow! Such delicious meat!*”

Something about a carnivorous fairy didn’t sit right with me. But it was time for me to eat too. I placed some cheese and meat on a biscuit and took my first bite.

“Mm!”

The meat came out nice and crisp. Despite being seasoned with nothing but salt, biting down on the meat caused sweet juices to seep out. It paired well with the crunchy biscuit and cheese. Album followed my lead and ate his biscuit with cheese and meat on top too.

Lord Lichtenberger was using his personal knife to stab the meat and eat it off the end. If Captain Ludtink did such a thing, it would only make him look more like a bandit. But Lord Lichtenberger’s manner of eating was strangely elegant.

Our lunchtime eventually came to an end. There was nothing for us to do with me being unable to cast spells. We had to leave the forest instead.

Lord Lichtenberger began to speak up on the carriage ride home. “Hasn’t it been hard for you, being an elf who can’t use magic?”

“That’s how I felt when I lived in the village...”

But as soon as I stepped out of the Fore Elf village, there were plenty of other people who couldn’t use magic. They managed to thrive with their own personal strength. That discovery was a shock to me, but it was something I was so happy to learn.

“That’s why it doesn’t bother me anymore,” I admitted.

“I see.”

With a more personal atmosphere between us in the carriage, we made our way back to the capital.



WE made it back to the Lichtenberger residence.

“Kreh kreh!”

Amelia, now with a big bow tied around her neck, leaped toward me. She’d gotten even cuter in the brief time I was away...

“Kreh kreh?”

“Yes, everything went fine.” There was nothing that Amelia needed to worry about. I turned toward Lord Lichtenberger and bowed deeply. “Thank you for everything today, Your Lordship. I learned many new things.”

If my magical energy was sealed away, then I had more things I needed to look into. It was going to take a lot of work. Just as I was firing myself up for that, Lord Lichtenberger said something I never expected to hear.

“For now, come back twice a month. I’ll have a lecture for you next time.”

“Pardon?”

“I’ll still fill your head with facts about magic, even if you can’t use your energy, so come prepared.”

“O-Okay...”

I thought today would be the end of our master-pupil relationship, but it appeared that Lord Lichtenberger was determined to keep going. There was nothing wrong with learning new things.

“Thank you for your help,” I said to him with a deep bow of my head.

Chapter 8: Turtle Soup—How Did it Come to This?!

“WE’VE got a mission.”

That was the announcement Captain Ludtink had for us in the morning.

“The location is the Seiren Gorge, about half a day away from the capital by carriage. As for the job...” The captain let out a sigh. He sounded depressed. “There’s been a witness report of a dragon, so we’ve gotta go confirm it.”

“A *what*?! Did you say a dragon?!” Liselotte was the first to react. I would expect nothing less of a Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau member. Dragons were considered the highest-ranking of all mythical beasts.

“The witness just claimed it was a dragon, but when the bureaus checked their description, it didn’t seem to match.”

Captain Ludtink handed Liselotte some documents. I looked over and saw the handwriting of Lord Lichtenberger, director of the bureau, saying, “This isn’t a dragon, so consult with the Monster Research Bureau instead.”

“The Monster Research Bureau looked into it and thinks it’s a water fin crocodile.”

Water fin crocodiles were monsters said to have bodies like lizards, but with fins attached to them. Their sharp teeth and claws made them a real threat. The metallic scales covering their whole body also functioned like armor. They were clever enough to swim around covertly in the water when they wanted to attack.

“But water fin crocodiles are huge creatures,” the captain said. “That’s why the witness probably thought it was a dragon. You also don’t usually see them in the Seiren Gorge, from what I’m told.”

That was why the Royal Order decided to consult the Magic Research Bureau about this case as well.

“According to a researcher from the Magic Research Bureau, the river that

runs through the Seiren Gorge has seen a big increase in magical energy the past few years.”

It was likely that, with this bountiful energy, a water fin crocodile had grown to be much larger than usual. I was sort of amazed. This was my first time seeing the Monster Research Bureau and Magic Research Bureau being used effectively. I only wished they could take their jobs seriously all the time.

Their research did appear to come in handy at unexpected times like these. They attracted attention for how weird they were, but it sounded like some members were devoted to their actual work. I started to see the bureaus in a slightly more positive light.

Captain Ludtink told us that our orders were to come back if we couldn't find the water fin crocodile after three days of searching. Our job for this mission wasn't to exterminate anything, but to survey the area. While the crocodiles generally didn't hang out on shore to attack people, they *were* known to charge anyone who got too close to the water. Killing the creature didn't seem like a bad idea, but our orders on this mission were to avoid killing it at all costs.

The Seiren Gorge was nestled between a mountain range on either side. It was a difficult place to access. The witness was a peddler who spotted the water fin crocodile from a mountain road. He had been traveling to deliver minerals to a neighboring country. There were no villages in the area and the monster was living in a river that ran through a valley, so there was believed to be little chance of any victims. We were being deployed to verify the truth of all this.

We were going to travel on horses. I didn't have the proper equipment yet for Amelia, so I would ride a horse and Amelia would follow us from behind. I had learned that, once she was fully grown, I would need to have special riding equipment like a helmet and saddle made. But the generous Mythical Beast Preservation Bureau would cover those equipment costs for me.

But could Amelia really fly for half a day? I asked her and received the reply that it was “Totally fine!” Well, it wasn't like I could leave her behind, so she would just have to do her best.

“All units, prepare for the mission.”

At Vice Captain Velrey's orders, we began our preparations. Three days' worth of food would surely fill a lot of cargo.

Amelia carried the bag Zara made her for expeditions in her beak. She entered the storage room with it. She prepared her own food, which included honey-soaked forest apples, dried fruit, and bottles of fruit juice. She neatly filled her bag with each item. She was such a capable griffin. I felt myself getting emotional.

"Kreeeh!"

"This should be enough to last through the expedition," I confirmed.

"Kreh!"

After I stroked her head, I needed to get started on my own preparations. A gorge with a river made me think there might be fish to catch. I wanted to collect food from the environment at the beginning of the mission.

I packed bread, dried noodles, oats, roasted beans, smoked meat, jerky, pickled vegetables, and more, splitting them into three separate bags. I also prepared personal food pouches that the members could keep on their belts. These were emergency rations in case we got separated. The bags contained biscuits, jerky, and dried veggies.

I had Captain Ludtink, Garr, and Zara carry the food bags on their horses' saddles.

Amelia wore her brown bonnet and cloak so that she wouldn't stand out. "*It's so plain and boring...*" she complained. I had to promise her that we could dress up and go out on the town when we got home.

It was time to group up. We each packed our equipment onto our respective saddles and mounted our horses. Fortunately, the horses didn't seem frightened by Amelia. These were true expedition horses. They had nerves of steel, all right.

Amelia was currently the size of a small horse herself. Seeing her next to the animals was a reminder of just how much she'd grown.

I wore the bottle with Sly on a string around my neck. I was in charge of Sly

since I was a noncombatant.

Finally, I went to see Charlotte.

“Mell, another expedition, yes?”

“That’s right. Let’s preserve more food together when I get home,” I told her.

“Okay. I be good and wait here.”

“Thank you, Charlotte!”

Reluctantly, in the face of Charlotte’s teary eyes, I—no, we of the Second Expeditionary Squadron had a job to do.

“Let’s head out.”

We rode off at Vice Captain Velrey’s signal. We headed through the rear entrance of the barracks and out into the street.

“Amelia, tell me if it’s too much for you. We can take a break when you need to,” I said.

“Kreeeh!”

“*This is nothing*,” Amelia said as she ran beside me. I only hoped she wouldn’t wear herself out along the way.

She eventually took off into the air after running for some time. She flapped her wings to sail forward, surpassing even Captain Ludtink.

“Amelia! Don’t go so far ahe—”

“Kreh kreeeeh!”

“Huh?”

Amelia let out a shout. She was telling us that there were monsters ahead. Sly began to tremble inside his bottle too, apparently sensing their presence.

This was bad. I raised my voice to report to the captain. “Captain Ludtink!!”

“What is it, Risurisu?!”

“Amelia says there are monsters up ahead!”

“There’s what?!”

Amelia told me that there were three lions with horns waiting for us in the center of the highway.

“Horned lions, huh?”

I had never heard of those monsters before, so I asked the others about them. Apparently, they would appear outside the royal capital from time to time. Horned lions were about five feet long with thick manes and large horns sticking out of their foreheads. We didn’t really want to fight such monsters, but the unit decided that they could handle a group of only three lions, so we decided to press forward.

Captain Ludtink ordered us to get into a battle formation before we ran into them.

The captain and Garr charged forward, followed by Zara, Ulgus, Liselotte and me together, then Vice Captain Velrey at the rear. Once we got a bit closer, we could make out the massive monsters in the distance.

“All units, prepare for battle!” Captain Ludtink barked orders at us. I collected Gula, my magic pole, from my saddle too.

The horned lions were incredibly ferocious. They were said to attack as soon as someone came into their sight.

Captain Ludtink kicked his horse to send it surging forward. As he charged past, he removed Superbia from its sheath and connected the blade with the head of the lion standing in front.

The captain continued forward. He never once stopped.

As soon as the lions turned to chase after him, Garr leaped off his horse and jabbed his magic spear, Ira, at them over and over again. He managed to pierce a weak spot and break one of their legs. Once the horned lion could no longer flee, Ulgus struck its heart with an arrow, causing it to collapse with a roar.

Two lions remained.

Zara was still on his horse as he swung his magic ax, Luxuria, down on a lion, but the first attack was dodged. It was such a heavy weapon, yet Zara swung the ax backwards in a circle and cracked the handle on the lion’s skull. It

slumped straight down to the ground. Captain Ludtink then dismounted his horse and severed the lion's head with his sword to finish it off.

The final lion seemed to understand its disadvantage. It began to fall back.

"Awww, I can't get it at this range..." Ulgus had an arrow ready to fire at the horned lion, but it was too far away now.

"Leave it to me!" Liselotte asked Vice Captain Velrey for permission to use magic.

"Permission granted, Sorcerer Lichtenberger."

"Roger."

The lion gained more and more distance. I wasn't sure she would make it in time, but then Amelia swooped down from above and clawed at the monster, preventing it from pressing forward.

"I think it's time."

With that signal from Vice Captain Velrey, I called out for Amelia to retreat.

"Amelia, get back!"

"Kreh!"

Amelia flew straight up into the sky to evacuate. Just then, Liselotte's magic circle appeared underneath the horned lion's feet, sending a column of fire billowing upwards.

Its giant body was burnt to a crisp in the blink of an eye.

The battle ended without incident.

I felt extra safe to have Vice Captain Velrey with us at the rear.

"Looks like there aren't any more enemies around us," Captain Ludtink announced. "Okay, let's cut the horns off and bring 'em home."

Whenever we killed monsters, we had to bring their horns or claws back to headquarters to submit with a report.

Captain Ludtink took out the large knife fixed to his belt. He held the lion's head down with his foot and sawed off the horn with his blade.

“Damn it... Why’s...this thing...so...hard...?”

Captain Ludtink scrunched his face up in a terrifying way as he brought the knife down against the horn. It looked like he wouldn’t be able to cut it without a thicker blade.

“He just looks like a bandit to me...” Ulgus’s words startled me. It felt like he’d just read my mind.

“Hey, Zara. Lend me your ax.”

“It’s not a woodcutting ax!”

Despite his complaints, he ended up lending his battle ax to the captain, who separated the horn with one swing this time. There was one burnt horn and two bloody horns. Captain Ludtink stuffed them in his bag with a grin.

“Let’s take a break now.”

We decided to rest by the nearby river. It was a bit early, but now was as good a time as any to have lunch. The other members gave their horses water and washed their weapons. Captain Ludtink and Garr were covering the monsters’ bodies with dirt.

It was chilly outside, so I hoped to have some sort of warm soup for lunch...

“Ah!”

I spotted potential food on the riverbank. A black creature was sunbathing on top of a boulder. Though it looked just like a pond turtle, it was actually a river turtle. These were very nutritious when eaten and were even sold as a luxury food, or so I’d heard.

River turtles were native to the rivers near my village. They were delicious, so I captured and ate them many times throughout my life.

“Kreh?”

“Amelia, I’m going to capture that river turtle.”

“Kreh!”

River turtles were ferocious beasts. They had strong jaws and would lock onto your body, refusing to let go until you tore them off.

“Be careful, Amelia.”

“Kreh!”

I squeezed Gula. In my village, we used traps to hunt them. But I didn’t have any tools on me in this situation, so I decided to hunt like Captain Ludtink—using the ancient technique of beating it to death with a pole.

Amelia and I stealthily approached the river turtle. Once I was close enough to reach it, I raised my pole, waited for the right moment, and swung it down as hard as I could.

The pole struck the turtle’s shell with a loud clang. It stuck its long neck out and glared at me. I knew I hadn’t managed to take it out with one hit.

The turtle snapped its teeth at me and began to draw closer.

“Eeeek!”

“Kreh!”

I began to retreat in fear while Sly trembled in his jar. Amelia, on the other hand, stepped forward.

“P-Please be careful!”

“Kreh!”

Amelia swung her claws down on the river turtle, grinding its head into the ground with her foot. It thrashed its limbs around to escape, but after a while, it fell still.

“You did it! You’re so amazing, Amelia!”

“Kreeeh!”

I’d managed to secure a river turtle with Amelia’s help.

I glanced around to make sure my squadmates weren’t watching. I was certain that some of them would complain about having to eat something like a turtle, which they didn’t see as food. I would prepare the turtle quietly and keep the source of the meat a secret when I fed it to the unit.

“What’s wrong, Melly?”

“Eep?!”

I whipped my head around. Zara was looking at my river turtle with a startled expression.

“Is that for us to eat?” he asked.

“Urk... Yes.”

“Really? It’s...not a pond turtle, right?”

“This is a river turtle.”

“Huh.”

I had to insist that it was a high-end food and very delicious. Despite my worries about this topic, Zara simply smiled and accepted it.

“I’m so excited to try it.”

“Th-Thanks.”

Thank goodness. Zara’s okay with it.

Captain Ludtink, on the other hand, wouldn’t be able to handle eating turtle meat. He managed to eat slimes that had been turned into food products just fine, yet he objected to any food that looked unappetizing, like fisheyes.

“Need help with anything?” Zara asked.

“In that case, could you start a fire and boil some water for me?”

“Leave it to me.”

I breathed a sigh of relief.

River turtles that lived in swamps needed to have the mud cleaned from them, but luckily, the water here was clean. I probably didn’t need to worry about mud or dirt.

I cut into the river turtle on top of a flat rock. I started by making a deep cut into the neck and then drained the turtle’s blood. The crimson liquid spilled onto the rock. My dad and grandpa would drink this blood with their liquor. They said it was full of nutrients.

Once the blood was gone, I cut into the river turtle’s shell and removed it. The

rim of the shell was soft. I removed the organs, cut off the limbs, took out the meat, and let the chopped-up pieces steam for a bit. Then I washed the meat with water and added it to the boiling pot.

No one else would find out about this special ingredient, as Zara was the only one with me at the stove. Next, I added dried veggies, medicinal garlic, and spices to give it a certain flavor. After it simmered for a while, the soup was ready to eat.

This was exactly when Captain Ludtink returned.

“Smells good.”

“Oh, ah, yes!”

I knew he was hungry. I’d poured Captain Ludtink a bowl in advance so that it wouldn’t be too hot for him. I made sure to fill it with simple meat parts and nothing strange like fins. I grilled his bread to make it crispy too.

With lunch now ready, I went to call the other members to eat.

We all gathered around the pot for our lunch. I said my prayer before helping myself to the river turtle soup.

“Holy crap! This is so good!!” Ulgus’s reaction was extreme. When Captain Ludtink heard that, he couldn’t help but question me.

“What’s in the soup?”

“...Just the things I had on hand,” I coughed into my hand.

“That’s a vague description.”

Captain Ludtink’s response caused my heart to speed up. Damn that bandit and his sharp instincts.

“You must have been hungry, June,” Zara commented.

“I see. Food tastes best when you’re hungry, all right.”

Zara’s simple remark seemed to have persuaded the captain. Ulgus continued to eat in a trance-like-state.

Captain Ludtink then brought his bowl up to his nose and began to sniff it. “I think I’ve smelled this before...” He used his spoon to try the soup.

“This is river turtle soup.”

As soon as he heard that revelation from Liselotte, Captain Ludtink began to choke on his soup. I could see the tears in his eyes.

“Oh? What’s the matter?” she asked him.

“Turtles? Those pond creatures that have been walking around here looking like rocks with legs?!” he gagged.

“They’re not pond turtles, they’re *river* turtles,” Liselotte corrected him.

I never expected Liselotte to see right through me. She was a nobleman’s daughter, all right.

“We used to raise them at home,” she said.

“You raised river turtles?” I asked.

Liselotte said that they kept the animals at the Lichtenberger home so that they could eat them. “But Father took a real liking to them...”

“What? To the river turtles?”

“Yes.”

She told me he would wash their shells, feed them, and dote on them in general. But after they kept the turtles for some time, a tragedy occurred.

“A river turtle bit him.”

“O-Oh no...”

Lord Lichtenberger had been enraged. Despite all the love he showered them with, they ended up becoming that night’s dinner.

“The cooks made all that turtle soup, but Father still didn’t eat it...” Liselotte said.

“I’m sure he had mixed feelings about it.”

After that day, river turtle soup was never served at the marquess’s home again.

“In that case, I’m sorry about what I made for lunch,” I said awkwardly.

“No, it’s fine. I love this soup. It’s delicious,” Liselotte assured me.

“Thanks for saying so.”

I tried the soup for the first time too. The first flavor that hit me was a rich umami. The meat tasted somewhat plain, like poultry, but it had a wonderful crunch to it. Even the jiggly fin pieces were delicious.

“The broth turned out wonderful. It warms the whole body,” I said, giving my evaluation.

“Yes, it really does,” Liselotte agreed.

Everyone really enjoyed my lunch. Even Captain Ludtink finished his soup, though his face was scrunched up the whole time.

I was ready to keep the expedition going into the afternoon.



THANKS to the favorable conditions, we arrived at the gorge faster than expected. We left our horses with the owner of a hut at the base of the mountain.

“I don’t know what to do here,” Captain Ludtink murmured to himself. He was unsure if we should go down into the valley to examine the area, or if we should climb the mountains and look down into the valley from above to investigate it. “We can avoid the water fin crocodile in the mountains. But they’re covered in snow, so it’ll be tough to camp there.”

We descended through the forest and eventually reached the river itself. But the gorge was surrounded by cliffs, the ground underneath us was rugged, and the river had a water fin crocodile lurking in it.

“Well, we’ll definitely run into monsters if we go through the forest,” the captain said. “Fighting on a slope puts the enemies above you at an advantage.”

Climbing the mountain itself would be difficult. Encountering monsters there would be a nightmare.

However, the danger of the gorge itself remained.

Our superiors had told Captain Ludtink to decide on his own course when he got to the scene. It was unusual to see him struggling with a decision like this. He closed his eyes, as if deep in thought about something. He didn’t ask for

anyone else's opinion, as this decision belonged to Captain Ludtink alone.

"All right."

He seemed to have made up his mind. We were heading to...the gorge. Now we would climb downward through the forest until we reached it.

The Seiren Gorge.

The rapid river ran straight through the deep valley. The sheer number of monsters here made it difficult for people to get anywhere near it. According to the Magic Research Bureau members, rocks here were mined to become high-grade magic stones. They'd come here many times to harvest and investigate the area, but between the rough terrain and monster run-ins, they were always forced to retreat.

Just how would our own investigation turn out? My one hope was that we didn't run into this water fin crocodile.

I was carrying the luggage I had removed from my horse's saddle on my back. Vice Captain Velrey tied my pot to my bag.

"Is that too heavy, Medic Risurisu?"

"No, I'm fine."

I stuck Gula to my bag too. It was tied up with rope so that I could keep my hands free as we walked. The food was too much for me to carry alone, so I split it up for Liselotte, Ulgus, and Garr to take too.

Our preparations were finished. It was time to head out!

First, we descended the mountain path to reach the gorge. Fortunately, there didn't seem to be any monsters around. Not only that, but the animal trail we took was in relatively good shape, making it easy to walk. But then...

"Eek!"

Liselotte lost her footing. Garr caught her immediately.

"Lichtenberger. Be more careful."

"R-Right..."

Captain Ludtink gave her that reminder. She thanked Garr and got back on

her feet. I could tell she was angry that she had let the unexpected misstep get the best of her.

The mountain path was covered in snow. We were wearing shoes with rivets in the soles, but the ground was frozen in a way that made it easy to slip. There were other things we needed to be wary of too. One wrong step and we could end up falling over the cliff and straight down to the bottom of the valley. It was a terrifying path we were on.

As I walked, paying close attention to my footing, I heard some sort of chime.

“Huh?”

It was the sound of a bell resonating through the mountain—somewhere you wouldn’t expect to hear such a sound. I stood still and listened closely. There was definitely some sort of bell ringing. What could it be?

“Kreh... Kreh!!”

Amelia had noticed the strange noise too. Garr also had his ears perked up and his fur puffed up.

“Risurisu, what’s the—”

“Ah! Whoa!!”

“Kreeeeeh!”

That was when a monster came flying out right before my eyes. It was completely black and about the size of the palm of my hand. I couldn’t tell what it was, since it was surrounded by some sort of mist. It hovered in midair.

Ding, ding. The high-pitched bell sound continued. That was when a magic circle formed in midair. Two icicles appeared, as if they were the monster’s horns, and went shooting forward like arrows.

“Gyah!”

“Kreh!!”

Amelia struck one of the icicles with her claws just before it hit me. Zara split the other one into two pieces with Luxuria. Captain Ludtink tried to slash the monster itself with Superbia, but it failed to connect with the fast, nimble

creature.

I was just so shocked. I'd never heard of a monster using spells before.

Ding.

"Huh?!"

I heard the bell sound from behind me. When I turned around, I locked eyes with a black mist-enveloped being—another monster!!

I cried out in shock. Just then, a magic circle formed in front of my eyes.

Ding, ding.

The bell rang twice. The magic circle floated in the air and produced an icicle.

I can't dodge it!! I covered my head and squeezed my eyes shut.

"Melly!"

I heard Zara call out to me. A strong force pushed my body down to the ground.

The piercing impact of the sharp icicle never came. Instead, I felt my body sailing through the air. I realized Zara had protected me...but that one impact wasn't the end of it.

"Gyaaaaah!!"

"Ngh!"

We were thrown down the cliffside. Zara held me in his arms while we went tumbling down. It was more of a steep slope than a cliff. The ground under us was made of dirt and dry grass as we rolled downward together.

"Gyaaaaah!!"

We trailed down the slope. Along the way, my bag opened up and sent the contents flying. Various food ingredients appeared and disappeared in front of me like my life was flashing before my eyes.

Aaaah, my bread... My jerky... My pickled veggies... My roasted beans... Farewell. Ah, my smoked meat and biscuits too...

My giant pot also broke off from my bag and rolled down the hill with us. I

was so sad to see my cherished pot that I had picked out with Vice Captain Velrey end up in such a state.

Zara and I continued to roll down the hill in a pile together.

I was scared, in pain, and upset at the loss of food. But Sly was still safe, hanging from my neck. He was cocooned between Zara and me.

We weren't slowing down. My voice had already gone hoarse.

And then, finally, at the very bottom...

"Wh-Whoa! EEEEEEEKKKK!!"

My body was thrown off the slope.

Its destination...was the nearby river. I went in with a big splash and fell unconscious.



"...lly...lly..."

"Mmmph..."

I felt my body being rocked back and forth with force. It was making me nauseous. I was also extremely cold for some reason.

"Melly!!"

"Ah-choo!!"

I opened my eyes just slightly and was met with the sight of Zara looking down at me with grave concern. The exquisite beauty hailing from the snow country... *No, now's not the time for that!!*

Where was I...? It was like we were in some sort of dark cave, judging by the rough walls of stone all around us. I could see a faint bit of sunlight streaming in too.

"Does you hurt anywhere?" he asked.

"Um... No, I'm fine."

I felt some pain from where I'd bumped my body on the ground, but those were nothing more than bruises and scratches. I wasn't bleeding, nor had I

broken any bones.

“Thank goodness...”

In a daze, I sat up and tried to remember how we got to this point.

We had run into unexpected monsters and came under attack. A magic icicle shot right at me, but Zara dove on me to save me. Then we rolled down the mountainside together and ended up falling into the river.

Zara must have brought me back to land after I passed out. That was what led to the present situation. Sly seemed to be safe, though he was trembling nervously inside his bottle.

“It’s all right, Sly.” I squeezed his jar to warm him up. “Are you hurt at all, Zara?”

“Nope, I’m totally fine. I’m a lot tougher than I look.”

“I’m glad you’re all right.”

So, despite our dramatic tumble, neither of us were severely injured.

“I’m so sorry, Melly. I couldn’t keep you safe.”

“No, you did more than enough! Um, thank you so much!”

Zara bowed his head deeply toward me.

“If you hadn’t rescued me, right now, I would be...”

Skewered by the icicle, most likely. My whole body shuddered.

“Are you okay?”

“Ah, yes, I’m just a bit cold.”

It appeared that I wasn’t shuddering because of the monster, but simply because my whole body got soaking wet in the river. I felt an intense chill as soon as the relief settled in. There was no escape from the cold with everything in my bag being just as soaked.

“You really ought to wring out the water in your clothes,” Zara advised. “It’s probably a good idea to take off your underwear and stuff too.”

“Ah, th-that’s true.”

This was a form of necessary first aid. I needed to take my clothes off and wring out the water.

“I’ll go wait at the cave entrance to keep an eye out,” he said.

“I’m sorry for the trouble.”

Zara dashed off toward the entrance.

I took off my bag, placed it on the ground, then removed my heavy overcoat, uniform, underwear, and socks. I was basically naked. It was *sooo* cold. With trembling hands, I tried to wring out the overcoat, but...

“Aaaaaah! It’s so cold!”

“Do you want me to wring your clothes, Melly?”

“Ah, um, I don’t know...”

My fingertips were too numb to use them with any strength. I didn’t know what to do about that, but I decided to have Zara wring my clothes out for me in the end.

“Sorry, but I’m naked, so please keep facing the other way.”

“Huh? Ah... Right.”

I gently laid my overcoat behind Zara’s back.

He squeezed all the water out for me. While he worked, I wrung out my underwear and uniform. Zara returned my overcoat, which I put over my bare skin and fastened the front buttons.

It still felt cold against my skin, but most of the water was gone now.

“Thank you for helping me.”

I suggested Zara wring his clothes out next, but he shook his head.

“I-I’m from a snowy country, so this is nothing for me.”

“Really? But your face is flushed and your ears are so red. You should definitely dry your clothes out.”

Thinking that he’d caught a cold, I reached my hand up for his forehead, but he dodged it without any trouble.

“R-Really... I’m fine.”

“You sure?”

I felt like he should still take some cold medicine anyway. I reached for the first-aid bag on my belt and opened it, but...

“Oh no...”

All of my powdered medicine had dissolved. Only the canned ointments remained unharmed. I checked on my food and belongings next. The bread had absorbed river water and turned to mush. There was unusable medical equipment like bandages too. My spare clothes and fire-starting tools were also soaked. All that was spared was the medicine drinking water I kept in a leather pouch.

Gula also remained fixed to my bag.

“I accidentally threw my ax aside before we fell off the cliff,” Zara sighed.

“I see...”

Zara’s only remaining weapon was the knife on his belt. His food pouches had been taken by the river too.

I was at a complete loss for what to do now. Where was I supposed to dry my underwear, for one? I squeezed my wrung-out clothes, frozen in place.

“Wh-What do we do now...?”

“Let’s wait for rescue to come.”

We decided the best option was to stay in the cave until someone came for us. My body trembled as I crouched down in the sunbeam making its way into the cave.

I couldn’t find a place to dry my soaked clothes, so I simply put them in my bag.

“Ah! Where’s Amelia?!” I touched the contract seal on my hand like before... but I couldn’t connect with her mind this time. “Wh-Why can’t I connect?!”

“I think maybe the magical energy in this place is messing things up,” Zara suggested.

I remembered how many of the rocks here were used to turn into magic stones. That appeared to be hindering my magic connection to Amelia.

“We’ve got no choice but to wait for help,” Zara said.

“Yes... I suppose you’re right.”

I kept my knight’s uniform near the cave entrance to dry. That way, the others might spot us easier. I also felt like Amelia was most likely to find us. Of course, that was only if they’d managed to defeat the monsters.

“I wonder why those monsters were using spells?” I said.

“I don’t have a clue. I’d bet it has something to do with the increase of magical energy in these parts.”

“That makes sense.”

I prayed that our squadmates were safe.

One bit of good luck was that I wasn’t hungry yet. But that would probably be an issue after more time passed. Sly...looked like he’d calmed down quite a bit. He was still and quiet inside the magic jar. I gave him some of the water from my only surviving leather bag. It had medicinal herbs inside it to kill bacteria and prevent it from spoiling during the expedition. These herbs caused Sly to turn green.

I’m sure it’s fine. I’ll just have to pray that he turns back to orange.

“Ah, Zara, you have a cut under your chin.”

Fortunately, my ointment for wounds was still usable, so I knew I had to do my job as a combat medic. I washed the wound clean, using as little of our limited drinking water as possible.

“Does it hurt?”

“Whoa?!” Zara squeezed his eyes shut tight in what looked a lot like pain.

“I’m sorry. If only I could use healing magic...”

“N-No, it’s totally fine! K-Keep going...”

“Okay.”

I pulled a handkerchief out of my bag to dry his chin...but then I caught sight of the frills and recoiled. I would never bring a frilly handkerchief on an expedition. This was...well, there was no getting around it—my underwear.

I shoved them back into my bag in a panic. That was way too close. I almost wiped Zara's face with something completely unthinkable. This time, I removed the real handkerchief, wiped his chin, and applied the ointment.

"All done?"

"No, please wait just a minute."

Zara still had his eyes closed. He didn't look pained anymore, though his face was still red. Unfortunately, my fever medicine was in powder form, so I lost it all in the water.

But then I remembered something. My mom had a good luck charm for when we caught colds. It always made me feel better in no time when she did it. Thinking back on it now, it might have been a spell.

I decided to try it out, since it might make him feel better.

"Pardon me for a moment."

"Huh?"

I brushed Zara's bangs back and pressed our foreheads together.

"M-Melly?!"

"Please hold still." I frantically tried to recall the spell Mom used to use. "Blood for blood... Bone for bone... Restore all that is lost."

Then I separated from him and brushed his bangs back into place with my fingers.

I told him I was done. He was wide-eyed and staring at me.

"That was a Fore Elf good luck charm my mom did for me when I had a cold," I explained.

"A good luck charm?"

"Yes. I'm sorry that I can't do more."

“No, it’s fine. Thank you.”

He told me that he felt much better now.



MY first-aid treatment was complete, but we continued to shiver all the same. It was downright freezing.

Zara tried his best to start a fire for us. He gathered vines from the cave and tried to start the fire by hitting rocks together. He managed to get a spark, but it never transferred to the vines. They were probably too wet to burn.

“Oh, right. Your good luck charm reminded me of something, Melly.” Fire was a necessity to survive in Zara’s village. The children studied fire-starting spells when they turned ten. “I learned this from my grandma, I just couldn’t use it because I had so little magical energy.”

Magical energy quantity increases with age, so he started to get better at it as he grew.

“Although, I haven’t tried it since I left my village at fifteen.” Zara used one of his rocks to draw a magic circle on the ground. “This is a spell from the ancient language called ‘Ignis.’ It means ‘fire.’”

A triangle of rippling lines formed in the center of the circle.

Zara began to recite the spell.

“Ignite!”

Wham! The flames coiled upward with a roar. But they disappeared the next second.

“I guess...I can’t do it...”

Zara’s brow was all sweaty now, perhaps because the spell used up a lot of magical energy.

I took my handkerchief out of my bag—whoops, those were frilly underwear. I was so annoyed to have made the same mistake twice in one day, I ended up throwing them far off into the cave.

I took the handkerchief out for real this time and wiped his forehead dry.

“Are you all right?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I’ll try it one more t—”

“Hang on just a moment.”

I removed my knife, exhaled deeply, and brought the blade to my palm. Blood oozed out of the wound.

“Oh no, Melly! What are you—”

“My blood contains lots of magical energy. I’m certain you’ll succeed if you use my blood as a medium. Could you draw the magic circle with it, please?”

“What?!”

I urged him to act quickly before the blood clotted.

He drew a smaller circle than before due to the small amount of blood he had to work with.

Again, he recited the spell.

“Ignite!”

This time, a pillar of fire erupted with a roar. It crackled and burned, appearing unlikely to vanish this time.

“Th-This is...what your energy is capable of, Melly...?”

Zara’s eyes were wide in astonishment. As for me, on the other hand...

“W-Woohooooo!”

I cried out with glee. But then I noticed that Zara had a pained look on his face.

“Oh, did you run out of magical energy?”

“No, it’s not that. You just have so much power...”

“Zara?”

He’d whispered the second sentence too quietly for me to hear.

“No, it’s nothing... Your fire is so nice and warm, Melly.”

“It’s all thanks to your knowledge about magic, Zara!”

At any rate, we'd managed to secure a fire. The cave instantly transformed into a warm space. The warmth of Zara's fire was enough to fight off our shivers.

"Thanks, Melly. You really helped me out of a pinch. But don't ever do *that* again, okay?"

"I'm sorry about that."

Zara gave me a gentle warning not to do anything as crazy as lend out my blood for free use.



THE two of us spent our time absentmindedly together. I squeezed Gula in place of a cane to stop myself from collapsing. The sun was setting, turning our cave darker and darker.

"The others probably won't be able to move at night, so I assume they'll start searching again in the morning," I said.

"Yeah, I think you're right."

We made simple conversation to distract ourselves from the situation.

Sly seemed to want to leave his jar, but without Garr around, I needed him to stay settled in there. At least he'd turned back from green to orange. All we could do now was wait to be rescued.

I didn't say this out loud, but I was starving.

I had no desire to eat that soggy bread. It had soaked up all the water from a river where monsters resided, after all. It was unthinkable... But just in case, I set the bread by the fire to dry it out.

We would have to eat it if we got desperate.

"Um, Melly, are you sure you're doing okay?"

"...Yes, *I'm fine*."

I didn't want to say it to Zara, but I was starving!! Warm soup, fluffy bread, fatty meats, tender-cooked fish. Pickled veggies, salty roasted beans, jerky...

My head was filled with delicious cuisine.

Ah, I should have filled up more at lunch. I wouldn't have been so hungry without that decision I made to wait and fill up on dinner. I didn't want to eat the soggy bread.

Gross foods weren't for me.

I wanted something tasty.

I... I...

My stomach let out a growl. I knew Zara had to have heard it too. How mortifying. My face started to burn up, but then...

"Huh?"

"Hmm?"

Zara and I piped up at the same time. A black magic circle had suddenly appeared in front of me. It looked like the magic circle I saw that time Garr's weapon activated.

"C-Could this be the power of my magic pole?"

"Gula" meant "Gluttony" in the ancient language.

Don't tell me it's built for food?

I read the words that appeared in the magic circle.

"Um..."

"Choose a food."

"Whoa!"

D-Does this magic circle produce food? I did as told with trembling hands. Some kind of selection manifested within the circle.

"Food name: Tartaruga."

"Tartaruga... It sounds like the ancient language, but I'm not sure what it means," I said.

"It's like, I kinda recognize it, but I kinda don't," Zara replied.

"That's how I feel too."

I knew this had to be a spell to create food. There was only one option, but that was plenty for me and my empty stomach. I pressed the word that was floating in the magic circle.

The circle became engulfed in light.

Just then, I felt my body turn limp. It appeared that the spell was taking my magical energy to produce the food. Just what could a tartaruga be? My heart raced as I waited for the light to recede...

"Huh?"

"Oh?"

I was lost for words when I saw the food item sitting on the magic circle. It was a creature with a black shell, long neck, and stubby limbs—a river turtle.

Are you telling me this is the food? So tartaruga must mean "river turtle" in the ancient language.

Still, a river turtle of all things...?

It was going to be pretty tough to eat without any seasonings. But there was no arguing with the state of my hunger. The turtle appeared to already be dead. It wasn't moving at all.

"I guess we'll just have to eat this..." I muttered.

The food was born from my own magical energy. I couldn't let it go to waste. I removed my knife from my belt and stared at it silently for a bit.

"I can't sterilize my knife without my pot," I admitted.

"Right. That's tricky."

I cradled my head and let out a groan. I only ever used my cooking utensils after sterilizing them.

"W-Well, the knife is washed...so I'm sure it's fine...I hope..."

As much as I hated the idea, I knew you couldn't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs. Zara and I went to the riverside to clean the turtle.

"The river is pretty calm in this area," I observed.

“Mm-hmm. But the water’s as deep as you are tall, Melly, so be careful.”

“Right.”

I peered into the river and saw fish gliding around elegantly in the water. I knew it would be tough to catch them without any tools. Maybe I could wrap a vine around some bait and reel them in with it... No, that was impossible. I didn’t even have any bait in the first place.

With a sigh, I began to drain the turtle’s blood.

“Do you want to drink the blood, Zara?”

“I’m not sure I could stomach it on its own.”

“It’s very intense.”

Despite its nutrition, we had no liquor to mix it with, so I drained it into the river. I proceeded with the cleaning and laid the meat out on a spare shirt.

“How should I cook this?”

“We’re in a bit of a pickle, huh?”

I didn’t see any sticks I could use for skewers when I looked around the area. The meat would instantly turn to ash if I stuck it in the fire.

“Hmm... Why not cook it on stones?” Zara suggested.

“On stones?”

Zara picked up a flat stone near the riverbed.

“You heat this up inside the flames.”

“Ah, I see. It’s like a natural grill.”

I decided to make use of his suggestion. Zara carried the flat stone back to the cave. He set it next to the magic circle and pushed it into the fire using Gula. The stone instantly turned bright red.

“Looks like this will work,” Zara said.

“I agree. Maybe the magic stone material and magic fire will be extra compatible.”

“That’s possible.” Zara scraped the reddened stone back out with Gula.

I lined the river turtle meat up on the stone's surface. It began to produce a simmering sound as it cooked. The scent wafting up to my nose was somewhat...unique. It seemed like turtle meat really did need spices to cover the odor.

Inhaling all that smoke made me gag too. I covered my mouth with my hand.

Then I turned the meat over with my knife. It finished cooking in a short time due to the sheer heat of the stone. I took the river turtle meat off the stone and placed it on my handkerchief. The appearance and smell of the meat weren't particularly appetizing. I was overwhelmed, but not in a good way.

The sun had fully set when I looked outside. It appeared that we would have to spend the full night here, much to my disappointment. I decided to eat my meal to collect myself. My forks and spoons were lost to the river, so I had to eat bandit-style—stabbing my knife into the meat and eating it from the tip.

I said my prayer, and then it was time to dig in.

The outside of the river turtle meat was crisp. It was freshly harvested, piping hot meat, and yet...

"Ugh! How gross!!" I screamed. I screamed as loud as I could.

My cry of "Gross!!" echoed off the walls of the cave.

Despite the delicious turtle soup we enjoyed for lunch, without any spices, the meat itself had a disgusting taste. I was so shocked.

"Are you all right, Zara?"

"...Yeah, this is nothing compared to male boar-pig meat in the spring."

Zara explained that animals really stunk in the breeding season and could hardly be eaten. But they had no choice, since the snow in his village didn't melt, even in spring. I could tell that Zara's hometown existed in a far harsher environment than my Fore Elf Forest. I wished I could fill his stomach with delicious food, but the river turtle on its own was too little to work with.

"Still, Gula sure has mysterious magic," I said.

"It does. I wonder why the river turtle is all that came up?"

Maybe I could only select the things I ate that day? But if that was the case, the list should have been a lot longer. I had smoked meat and cheese soup with winter vegetables for breakfast. I also had boiled eggs and fresh-baked bread. Then I ate fruit with Amelia before we shipped out today. On top of that, there were the baked goods Zara made for me and the chocolate Liselotte gave me. All of it was so delicious.

Thinking back on the day's food was making me sad.

"Now that I think of it, I think I hit the river turtle's shell with Gula earlier this afternoon."

"Then maybe it can only create the food it's touched?"

"That might be... Ah!"

That was when I remembered that Captain Ludtink recently used Gula to kill a mountain rabbit. The rabbit, however, wasn't on the list.

"It might only be foods that you've touched directly?"

"That's a possibility."

If only mountain rabbit meat had been an option. How could it be river turtle meat, of all the food in the world?

"All we can do right now is enjoy the river turtle we've been given."

"Yeah..."

I cleared my mind of greed and stuck my knife into the meat. What followed next was...

"Not the fins! I can't do it!"

"This rotten flavor is filling my whole mouth... Darn you, fin! Grrr!"

"Urk! Thank you for these blessings from the river...!!"

"I can do this! I can do this!!"

I had to raise my voice to get myself to finish the river turtle.

Zara finished his portion with perfect manners, but I knew he wanted to die inside with each bite too. At times like these, our difference in upbringing really

shined through.

I wasn't exactly full, but I was no longer starving. I knew Zara must still need to eat more, though.

"Let's go to bed, Melly."

"All right."

He wanted to take turns being the lookout. Zara said I could be the one to sleep first. I wasn't sure I would be able to sleep without a blanket or pillow. However...

"Zzzz."

I was out like a light in the blink of an eye. I must have been exhausted.



I awoke to the sensation of sunlight pouring into the cave. It was so bright in the morning...

Wait, the morning?!

"Aaaaahh!!"

I sat up in a total panic. We were supposed to trade roles, but I accidentally slept through the entire night.

"Morning, Melly."

"Good morning... Um, I'm really sorry!" I bowed on the ground to apologize to him.

"Don't beat yourself up. I didn't feel like I could sleep anyway."

"I'm really, really sorry."

"It's totally fine."

"But...!"

Zara had an offer for me. "In that case, could you maybe make me some of that meatball stew again? Any time is fine."

"Yes! I'd love to!"

I promised him that I would cook him the most delicious meatball stew I could. Talking about meatballs caused my stomach to growl.

“What should we do?”

“I had an idea, actually.” Zara had come up with a method for obtaining food. “You know how the magic stones can heat up? We could throw them into the river outside.”

“I see!”

That way, a portion of the river would boil and the fish would float to the top. It would never work with normal stones, but the source of magic stones would probably be able to do such a thing to the river.

We got to work gathering palm-sized rocks and stuck them in the fire. They turned bright red in no time at all. Zara raked the larger stones out with Gula and skillfully swept them out toward the river. Then he dropped the heated stones into the water.

There was one brief wave of bubbles that rose to the surface like when water boiled. But then...

“Wow! Look at that!”

Several fish floated up to the water’s surface. I took my spare shirt and held it out to scoop them up. There were fourteen fish in total.

“What a haul!”

“That’s a relief.”

Zara’s plan was a huge success.

“I can’t believe you even thought of something like this in the first place.”

“Actually, it’s an old fisherman’s trick in my village.”

“I see.”

Thanks to him, we were in for a proper meal this time. Since I refused to eat any more stinky foods, I used my knife to remove the fishes’ guts.

“Ah, that reminds me.” Before cooking the fish on the heated stone, I gave it a hit with Gula, my magic pole. “I hope this allows me to make fish in the future.”

“Right, that’d be a real treat.”

With no spices to work with, I was about to grill it plain, but then...

“Hmm?”

Sly had started to tremble inside his magic jar. He probably wanted to tell me something. I’d given him water earlier, so I assumed he wasn’t hungry.

What could possibly have him trembling like this now? All I could tell was that he wasn’t trembling in a way that warned of danger. That was just the feeling I got.

“Do you think he wants me to let him out, since he hasn’t gone on his walk?” I asked.

“I really don’t know.”

I felt like it was better not to let Sly out when Garr wasn’t here. *Forgive me, Sly.* I put my hands together and apologized to him.

It was time to return to cooking. I placed the fish on the heated stone and let them sizzle. They cooked quickly due to the intense heat. As the source of magic stones, this stone didn’t seem to leave any of the fish meat sticking to it. That was very helpful in the process.

The grilled fish came out looking delicious. I said my prayer and dug right in. I cut the fish open with my knife and retrieved some of its meat.

“...Ooh!!” The tender meat was melting in my mouth. Each time I chewed, a faint hint of sweetness reached my tastebuds... “It’s soooo good!!”

The freshly caught fish was shockingly delicious. I chewed each bite thoroughly to savor the river fish.



IT appeared that Zara had kept my uniform close to the fire overnight so that it would dry.

“Thank you so much. That’s a big help.”

My clothes were stiff and covered in wrinkles, but the mere fact that I had dry clothes was enough to make me happy. I went to retrieve the underwear I

threw aside yesterday too. They'd dried while still balled up.

Those would stay inside my bag.

Most of the contents of my bag were dry now. Perhaps that was the effect of our magic fire.

I changed into a new pair of underwear.

After I put on my uniform, Zara had a new proposal in mind.

"Melly, why not see if you can use your contract seal one more time?"

Zara explained that the concentration of magical energy grew thicker from sundown to sunrise. Right now, I might be able to connect to Amelia.

"Okay. I'll try it."

"If it works, then I want you to check on the others, since Amelia will probably be with them."

"All right." I touched the seal on the back of my hand. "...Huh?"

For a split second, I managed to see through Amelia's eyes. The image I received was a glimpse of Liselotte being bound by vines in the forest.

"No way... Wh-What was that?!"

"What's wrong, Melly?"

I explained the situation I saw between Liselotte and Amelia.

"I see..."

This whole time, I'd been assuming, without a care in the world, that Captain Ludtink was leading the search for us. But one of them was tied up?

"I'm sorry. I should have tried it closer to sunrise."

"No, there's nothing we could do with wet clothes, empty stomachs, and no weapons."

"...True."

What should we do next?

Zara placed his hand on his chin like he was thinking about something.

Since we were downstream in the valley, climbing the cliffsides to reach the mountain hut would be a huge challenge. It could take more than half a day at the earliest.

The nearest village was about an hour away by horse. But there was no military base for knights there. Knights were deployed to a town three hours away. If we left now and managed to make it there without any trouble, it would be sunset or nighttime at that point.

We couldn't go anywhere at night when the monsters came out. That meant we wouldn't be able to return until tomorrow afternoon at least. I didn't know if the others would be able to last that long without injury.

"This is just a guess, but I think that thing we fought once we got on the mountain was a spirit, not a monster," Zara calmly concluded.

"A...spirit?"

"Mm-hmm. Something just doesn't seem right about how you, Garr, and Amelia didn't hear them until they were right next to us. Besides, normal monsters can't use spells," Zara pointed out.

Huh. I see what he means. But why did they come after us like that?

"Maybe...we angered the spirits of the forest, or something?" Zara guessed.

"Now that I think of it, the Magic Research Bureau said the same thing happened when they came for a survey."

But that only meant that sending the Royal Order out for help would have the opposite effect.

"What do you think, Zara?"

"I think the two of us should go by ourselves."

"I agree."

But there was a problem. How could we appease the anger of the forest spirits?

"I'd like to avoid the methods we used in our villages, thank you very much," I said with a shudder.

A human sacrifice. Offering up a human life and magical energy to beg their forgiveness.

No, we couldn't do such a thing. I shook my head. Zara declared that he would never think of it. But we couldn't exactly go empty-handed.

"In that case, why not sacrifice some food you make with Gula, Melly?"

A sacrifice of food I made with my magical energy... Would they really go for that? I clutched my magic pole and tried to summon it.

"....."

Nope. The spell refused to activate.

"I feel like your hunger is probably the trigger, don't you think?"

"That might be the case."

I couldn't use this stupid power at all!! I slumped down to my knees right on the spot. This was a waste of time while I was full, so we switched to the next topic.

"Melly, do you have a general idea of where the others are?"

"Let's see..." I touched my contract seal again. They were deep in the forest to the south of the valley. This time, Amelia's feelings also poured into my mind.

"What do you think you're doing, spirits?!"

"Don't eat Liselotte's magical energy!!"

"I'm so hungry!"

"I miss Mama Mell..."

I burst into tears when I heard Amelia's words. I couldn't believe she was hungry. She even said she missed me...

"Melly?"

"I-I'm sorry."

I took out my handkerchief to wipe my tears, but upon closer inspection, it was my spare underwear. I really needed to stop coordinating my handkerchiefs and undergarments. But that didn't matter right now.

I wanted to be with Amelia. I was so sad leaving her alone. But crying about it wouldn't help. We needed to discuss this.

"It sounds like this was the work of spirits, after all," I said. "What should we do, Zara?"

"Let's see...it probably isn't smart to head out in our uniforms," he advised.

"That's true. Traders who pass through the forest weren't attacked, so it's possible they look to see your clothes."

The Magic Research Bureau had uniforms that resembled the knights' in design.

"Then why don't we go back to the foot of the mountain, head to the village on our horses, and get different clothes?" I suggested.

"Sure, that sounds good. But there's a problem..." Zara didn't have a weapon with him. We would be at a big disadvantage if we had to fight monsters along the way. "Forgive me, Melly. I can't protect you and Sly with just my one knife."

"No... I'm not any help either..." I sighed.

What should we do? While I was trying to find an answer, Sly began to shake violently inside his magic jar.

"Sly...?"

"Looks like he wants to say something."

He'd been trying to tell me something last night too, but I had to apologize and ignore him.

"Zara, do you think I should let him out?"

"I really don't know. Garr isn't here... But it feels like he's way more insistent than yesterday."

"Yes, I agree."

I hadn't known Sly for very long, but he didn't seem like the type to run away or do something bad.

Zara and I agreed to open the magic jar. When I removed the lid, Sly hopped out with a jiggle of his body. He produced some sort of tentacles that he used to

make gestures in an attempt to communicate, but we didn't understand his message at all.

Finally, Sly began to tremble. His orange body lit up and a magic circle appeared in front of him. Then...

"Huh?!"

"This is...!"

A faintly glowing liquid began to gush out of the magic circle. It was none other than...holy water!

"Sly, that's amazing!"

"It's holy water!"

Incredible. I had no idea he was capable of making holy water!

Dousing yourself in holy water was a method of repelling monsters. When I asked if we could take it, Sly's two tentacles rounded together to make a circle. I figured that was his way of giving permission.

Zara and I sprinkled the holy water over our bodies. This was the solution to our monster problem.

"I can't believe it, Sly. I never knew you had the power to make holy water."

But then Sly began to shake back and forth as if to deny my words.

"Does that mean you don't have that power?"

Sly made a circle with his tentacles.

"What do you mean?"

"Um... Ah, maybe what he really has is the ability to retrieve anything he's ever absorbed?"

Sly threw his tentacle arms up in the air before forming a circle with them. Zara's answer was the correct one.

"Does that mean you don't have any more holy water?"

Four tentacles sprung up from the top of his head.

"Now what...are these?"

“Maybe he has four more bouts of holy water in him?”

Sly made a circle. He could produce holy water four more times.

“Were you trying to give me something when I was cooking earlier?”

Sly made another circle to confirm my suspicions. He shuddered and formed a magic circle. What poured out were pieces of citrus fruit, a spoonful of salt, and two mint leaves.

“These are ingredients from the water I let him drink yesterday. It looks like he wanted to provide me with some seasonings.”

“Wow, would you look at that?”

My medicinal water for the Second Expeditionary Squadron contained antibacterial herbs, squeezed citrus fruit juice, and salt. It appeared that he was able to break down the ingredients he drank and reconstruct them.

“Wow, so this is Sly’s true power!”

“What a fabulous ability to have.”

“Yes! Thank you so much, Sly!”

Sly stuck her—I suppose she’s a “her”—chest out when I thanked her. I had to bow my head deeply to her in gratitude.



ZARA, Sly, and I didn’t waste any time. We used the vines on the ground to climb the slope up the forest. Fortunately, the slope here wasn’t as steep as the one upstream, so even I managed to make it up to the mountain path without any help.

All that was left was to descend to the foot of the mountain now.

We had holy water on us, but Zara still walked around with his knife out just to be safe. I squeezed Gula tightly as I followed behind him.

The forest was shockingly quiet. It stoked the anxiety I was feeling. Zara seemed to feel the same.

“...I sure wish I could recover my weapon too...”

“Indeed.”

Zara said he’d tossed Luxuria aside before we fell down the cliff. I knew he must feel uneasy to be without his main weapon.

We spent about three hours descending the mountain.

I kept my eyes on the plants as we walked to see if any were edible, but it was nothing but poisonous grass and fruit all around us. I’d never been in such a lacking forest before.

Naturally, my stomach was empty.

“Ah, I bet I can use this!”

Gula possessed food magic. I squeezed it tight and demanded that the magic circle appear. Just then, a circle of light formed in front of my eyes.

“I did it!!”

It appeared that the magic only worked when I was hungry. There were circles within the magic circle itself. Were these my options? There was only one last time, but now there were three.

Could these be river turtle, fish, and citrus fruit? I’d touched some other food with my pole in case that would increase my options.

With my heart racing, I stared into the magic circle...

“Choose a food.”

“Food name: River turtle.”

Food name: River turtle.

Food name: River turtle.”

How could all three choices be river turtles?! Actually, it was only one choice!

Anger surged through me at the three identical food options. My stomach was growling, but all I had to work with were river turtles.

“Awwwww, darn it! I don’t want river turtles...”

I never wanted to eat grilled turtle without any seasoning again. When I told Zara, he didn’t look particularly pleased either. There wasn’t even a river to

wash them in. It would be hard to clean them to eat out here.

“Either way, it seems like the conditions to create food with magical energy aren’t just simply touching them with Gula.”

“Uh-huh... Maybe you, like, have to touch it when it’s still living,” he supplied.

“I see.”

That cleared up the mystery a bit, but my stomach remained as empty as ever. Then I remembered how we’d brought up the idea of sacrificing river turtles to the forest spirits.

I hit the words “River Turtle” with Gula. It was engulfed in light, causing a black object to appear.

“What?!”

But this wasn’t like last time. The river turtle was moving around and sticking its long neck out.

“No way... It’s alive!”

The previous turtle showed up already dead, but this one was alive for some reason. I put my head in my hands, at a loss for what to do. But thinking about it wouldn’t do me any good either way. Zara went and captured the turtle before it could get away, stuffing it in a leather bag.

“I just don’t understand this magic.”

“Mysterious, isn’t it?”

That was all that could be said. We continued to press forward, ignoring the hunger we both felt.

We arrived at the road where we had fought the spirits before, but I couldn’t find a single feather of Amelia’s at the site. Luxuria was nowhere to be found either.

With our shoulders slumped, we continued down the mountain.



WE finally reached the foot of the mountain.

The old man in charge of the area sympathized with us when we explained that we got separated from our squadmates. He even gave us soup, bread, and grape juice. I fed Sly the juice right away. The orange Sly's body transformed into purple.

Zara and I then dug into our first meal in half a day.

The warm soup permeated my fatigued body. It was a simple recipe of just vegetable scraps and salt, but it was still plenty delicious. The bread was hard-baked, so I dunked it in my soup to eat. It was so good. Food that came from civilization was delicious. I was moved to tears.

"Thank you for the food."

"Nah, head to the village and you'll find even better things to eat."

It was a feast compared to river turtles. I was filled with gratitude for the meal.

"I'm sure you're worried about the squadmates you lost too..." The man explained that the forest had undergone a major change in the last few years. "It used to be a dry forest. You didn't see very much green."

The forest contained none of nature's blessings, but traders could travel through it due to the mountain path that connected to a neighboring country. For years, it was a lonely place that no other people came near.

"The transformation happened a year ago. The forest became more bountiful than anyone could believe." The cause of this change was unknown. The Magic Research Bureau tried to investigate but were unable to come up with a clear answer. "Though, the old men and women of the village say that the spirits have returned to the forest."

"Does that mean they weren't here before?" I asked.

"That's right. Legends that have been passed down in the village say that they disappeared in a forest fire half a century ago."

"I see."

I imagined that the magical energy of the forest and valley had increased due to the return of these spirits. But that information wasn't included in our

mission documents, as far as I remembered. Was it possible that the bureau members never asked around for information? I would be dumbfounded if that was the case.

We thanked the old man, left the mountain hut, and mounted the horses we stabled there to head to the village.

We arrived an hour later and decided to change clothes.

There were about thirty homes in this village, two shops, and a restaurant. There were two small inns as well. It felt more like a settlement than a village. I had never seen stone houses like these before. They were stacked up without a single gap between them and painted to give them more appealing colors. It was wonderful craftsmanship, like a work of art.

But this was no time to be gazing at the village.

“Zara, I don’t have very much, but here you go.” I held out my wallet, which contained the two silver coins I had on me.

“Melly, that’s so kind.”

“Please use them however you like.”

Zara needed to get a weapon. If they did sell weapons here, they were probably expensive. We wasted no time in getting to our shopping. Our first stop was the one shop of the two that seemed to be a general store.

“Welcome.” The unfriendly, aging shopkeeper’s voice didn’t make us feel very welcome. Not at all. The shop was dusty and unorganized, packed full of shoes, bags, books, clothes, rugs, and more.

Zara pulled two thick twine coats, shirts, and pants out of the mountain of clothes. “Do these work okay, Melly?” He’d picked me out a gray overcoat, white shirt, and black pants.

When I took a look at the price tag, I was startled to see that they cost more than double the normal market price. They were secondhand clothes, too, not new items, which was all the more of a shock.

Next, we went to look at weapons, but...

“Ah!!”

“I-It’s...”

Zara’s magic ax, Luxuria, was being sold with a sale tag on it. Despite apparently being on sale, the weapon cost an entire gold coin.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me!”

“Someone must have picked it up and come here to sell it.”

I went to complain to the shopkeeper. “Um, excuse me, but that weapon actually belongs to us!”

“It what?”

“We lost it in the forest.”

“I don’t know what you’re on about.”

Whaaat?!

I was starting to shake with anger, but Zara told me to calm down.

Next, I tried showing the shopkeeper my bracelet that proved I was a knight... but he didn’t so much as budge. He went as far as to click his tongue at me. I realized that, in this town without a knights’ station, knights must wield absolutely zero authority.

Since he wasn’t going to give in, we had no choice but to purchase it.

“It’s so wrong to sell a stolen item for a full gold coin.”

“It’s a great weapon, plated on the outside but made with black steel on the inside. A gold coin is nothing for such high quality.”

Grrrrr. The shopkeeper had a good eye, after all.

“We just have to buy it.”

“But...”

Zara patted me on the shoulder. I knew he wanted me to give up. But between the two of us, Zara and I didn’t have enough money.

“Then will this do, hmm?” Zara removed his earring, which was made with a small red gem.

“Look at that!”

I looked at Zara to see if he really wanted to do this. I felt like these earrings must be special to him since he wore them all the time. If he just wanted to look nice, then he would probably go with different earrings from time to time.

“Um, are you sure about this, Zara?”

“Mm-hmm, it’s fine.”

“Zara...”

The shopkeeper had a big smile on his face. I didn’t have a good feeling about it.

“Still not quite enough... If you let me buy some of that beautiful golden hair of yours too, I’ll give you your items and half a silver coin.” He pointed at Zara as he spoke.

Despite me being a woman, the shopkeeper skipped right over me and called Zara’s hair beautiful. That made me a little bit sad. He explained that hair could be used to make wigs that were sold to nobles at a high price. This was the first I’d ever heard about hair being something you could buy.

I remembered the river turtle we had and asked if he would buy that instead, but he told me it wasn’t worth half a copper coin.

“Who would want such a muddy turtle?”

It was at that point that the turtle stuck its head out and snapped at the shopkeeper.

“H-Hey! Put that thing away already!”

“Ah, right. My apologies.”

Zara let out a long sigh before he responded. “...Okay then.”

“What? Zara, you can’t...”

“I’m fine with it.”

“But...”

“It’s been getting to be a bit of a pain to take care of lately, so this is perfect timing.” With that, Zara undid his ponytail, grabbed his hair, and sliced it off with his knife. “How’s this?”

“This will do well.”

We were on the verge of running out of money, but by buying food and supplies, we managed to receive half a silver coin. But that came at the loss of Zara’s hair...

“I’m really sorry that I couldn’t help at all, Zara.”

“Don’t worry. It’s my ax, after all.”

But still... Zara had lost something precious to him...at least, that’s how it felt. Guilt welled up in me and I started to get upset. As soon as we left the store, my tears spilled over, all at once.

“M-Melly?!”

I was so embarrassed. I tried to wipe my tears with the shirt I just bought, but it was too stiff to absorb any moisture. What a shock. The passing villagers kept looking my way. Zara led me to an outer wall of the shop where few people could see us.

“I’m really sorry I made you so upset,” he said gently.

“But you’re the one who’s been hurt...”

How could such beautiful hair end up on the head of some bald nobleman?! I knew he didn’t want to sell his earring either.

“It’s all right, Melly.”

“No it’s not...”

Zara placed his hands on my shoulders and leaned down to look me in the eyes. The way he spoke to me was so gentle. “You know something? There’s nothing that matters more to me than you, Amelia, and the members of the Second Expeditionary Squadron. My hair will grow back if I let it, and the earring was something my parents gave me in case I ever got in trouble.”

“.....”

He told me that he wasn’t attached to either of them. But did he really make the best choice? My mind was a mess, and I didn’t know how to feel anymore. This was no good. I’d felt more like crying than usual ever since we got

separated from the unit...

Zara wiped my tears away with his fingers. "Don't worry. I don't plan to let that shop get off so easily either."

"Huh?"

When I asked if he had some sort of plan, Zara began to chuckle under his breath. It looked like he was plotting some form of revenge that I would never be able to come up with.

But there was no time to laze around like this. We needed to get some food next.

The shop that sold food was a single-storied building that was something like a greengrocer. But just like the general store, it seemed to sell a bit of everything.

This store, however, had neat rows of bread, vegetables, fruit, meat, seasonings, and preserved foods. It had a much nicer atmosphere and was surprisingly cheaper than the other store. The smoked meats and dairy products were made from the village livestock, while the fruits and vegetables were grown locally too. That was what made them all so cheap.

I purchased enough bread and jerky for all of our squadmates. Then I got some fruit for Amelia too. I asked Sly, still inside the jar, what she wanted to eat. She trembled at the suggestion of fruit juice when I made it. I also asked if she wanted regular fruit with that, but she swayed back and forth to tell me no.

Could it be that Sly only absorbed liquids? I would have to ask Garr about it later.

The surprisingly low cost of the food meant we had some leftover money.

"Let's take the rest and go eat something, Melly. We need to change too, so we could get a room at the inn..."

"That sounds good."

The shopkeeper told us which of the two inns had a dining hall.

The two-storied building we were shown to was worn down, but it was still being cleaned properly, and the hostess was a kind woman. Zara asked her how

much it would cost for food, baths, and a two-hour rest.

“Oh, you only need two hours?”

“Yes, we’ll be on our way soon.”

“Oh my. You must be in a rush, huh?”

“...Yes.”

The friendly hostess told us we could stay for five copper coins per person.

“Sounds like you’re busy. I’ll bet you’re on your honeymoon, aren’t you?”

Zara stiffened at her comment. I, on the other hand, had already sensed that she saw us that way. Zara shook his head.

“Uh, no, we’re just—”

“That’s right, it’s our honeymoon!” I declared.

An unmarried man and woman traveling together in a hurry would obviously draw suspicion. The hostess was also giving us a cheaper room and food because she believed we were newlyweds. That was why we needed to stick to the story that we were on our honeymoon.

“Sorry about my husband. He’s easily embarrassed.”

“Oh, men are all like that.”

She didn’t seem to doubt our story at all. That was a relief. She showed us to a room on the second floor.

“The dining hall and baths are on the first floor. They should be ready for you in thirty minutes.”

“Thank you very much.” I bowed and thanked her. As soon as the door closed, Zara whipped around at an impressive speed.

“Melly?! O-Our honeymoon?!”

“Hmm? Isn’t it strange for an unmarried man and woman to be on a trip together? She might not have let us stay here otherwise.”

“Ah, r-right... That’s what you meant...”

It was strange. Zara was so daring in that general store, but when it came to

something trivial like this, he was easily flustered. However, there was something bothering me even more than that.

“Ah, that’s right. Let me fix your hair, Zara.” He’d only chopped it off with his knife, so it was quite disheveled now. “I cut my brothers’ and dad’s hair all the time, so I’m really good at it!”

Well, I wasn’t *that* good, but I didn’t want him to back out.

Zara was modest, or perhaps more accurately, he hated making trouble for people. That was why I had to be extra insistent when it came to showing him kindness. I felt like I’d come to understand how to interact with him lately.

Our squadmates would probably be shocked when they saw Zara’s short hair. I knew, if they found out he lost it to help rescue them, they would be sad too. That was why I needed to make him look more presentable at the very least.

“Would you mind fixing it for me, then?”

“Leave it to me!”

I cut away at his hair with my knife. Zara’s hair was much thinner and silkier than my family’s. This made it harder to cut, but I managed to make it look nice in the end. I brushed away the fallen hair on his shoulders and told him I was finished. I handed him a mirror and told him to give it a look.

“Wow... I even feel lighter too.”

“That’s what happens when you cut it.”

Zara turned around to look at me.

His hair had been down to his shoulders, but he told me that he wanted even more taken off, so I ended up cutting it as short as I could. It was still longer than Captain Ludtink’s close-cropped hair, though.

“How do I look, Melly?”

“Oh, ah, um, you look really handsome.”

“I do? That’s good to hear.”

It really surprised me. Zara always looked so feminine, not unlike a beautiful woman wearing men’s clothes, but this short haircut really brought out his

masculinity. I suddenly felt a little shy.

Hairstyles and lengths are really crucial to a person's image.

Despite everything that had happened, I was glad to see Zara smiling again. Not that a single one of our problems had been solved.

We decided to take baths after that. Sly was really expressing her desire to join me, so I took her along for the trip. The bath was nothing more than a large basin full of hot water. But I didn't need anything else other than that. I dipped my fingers in the water and felt that it was the perfect temperature. This was great news, as I hadn't expected the bath to be very hot.

The hostess had warned me not to touch the rocks in the bathwater. I looked in and saw them down there. These were the same magic stones that we discovered in the valley.

I took Sly out of her magic jar. She gestured with her tentacles to ask me to pour water on her. So, even Sly enjoyed baths—not just Amelia. That was very surprising.

I removed my clothes and got in the bath. I washed my hair and body with soap that didn't foam up at all and sunk deep into the hot water.



I feel so refreshed!

I quickly wrapped up my bath and drained the water. Then I changed into the clothes we bought at the general store and walked to the dining hall. Zara would come down later, apparently. I was a little sad to learn that Zara took longer baths than me. Not that it mattered.

Food was brought out to me as soon as I sat down. The meal consisted of soup, bread, a baked potato, cheese, and forest apples. There was fruit juice too. Taking in the aroma of wheat coming from the freshly baked bread seemed to remind my body of its hunger. My stomach let out a gurgle.

"Eat up, okay?" the hostess said.

"Thank you very much. I'm glad to have this food."

Every part of the meal looked delicious.

The soup was filled with beans and smoked meat! The beans were boiled until they were tender, pairing beautifully with the well-seasoned smoked meat. The baked potato had golden butter slathered on top, which was melting into it from the warmth. The potato had a faint sweetness to it—the perfect complement to the saltiness of the butter. It was incredible, and there was little more I could say than that.

I used the back of my fork to mash the butter up with the potato and spread it on a slice of bread. My tastebuds were so delighted, I couldn't help but let out a sigh. My heart was as full as my stomach. Every last part of the hostess's meal had left me extremely satisfied.



AFTER eating, I wore the equipment we'd purchased under my clothes. I put on my iron boots, knee pads, and thigh padding under my pants. Under my shirt, I equipped a plate that protected the front of my chest and torso. From the shoulders down, I wore arm protectors around my elbows.

The Royal Order required a surprising amount of equipment for a noncombatant. Combatants also required all these and additional shoulder armor, chin guards, and gloves.

What was most surprising was how thin and light the equipment still felt under my clothes. They were highly functional as armor too. It used a material known as boulder steel, a joint invention of the Magic Research Bureau and Monster Research Bureau, but I didn't know much more about it. In fact, this equipment was only given to expeditionary unit members who fought at the front lines. The mystery deepened.

But putting that aside, I was all prepared now, so it was time to return to the forest.

Could we really save the other members? I was worried, but I had Zara with me, and Sly too. I convinced myself that everything would turn out fine.

We rode our horses for an hour until we reached the entrance of the forest. Leaving the horses with the man in charge there, we entered the forest for the second time.

I touched the contract seal that linked me to Amelia. I focused intently on her location and watched as some sort of white thread of light emerged. I knew I would find her if I followed this thread. We didn't want to use up our strength now, if possible, so we had Sly use her holy water on us.

We treaded through the forest without saying a word. I hoped to find the others before nightfall, but this was far from an easy journey.

We walked for about three hours.

"...Ah!"

"What is it, Melly?"

"I hear that bell sound."

Ring, ring.

A small black mist floated up when the second bell rang.

"U-Um, my name is Mell Risurisu. It's nice to meet you, Mr. Spirit. I have a present (*river turtle) for you, so would you please allow us to pass?"

I frantically explained myself to the black mist (spirit?). It would all be over if it shot a spell at me. I had no way to react.

Riiing.

The black mist spun around, facing its back (?) toward us, and proceeded deeper into the forest.

"...Uhhh?"

"You think it wants us to follow it?"

I was just relieved that it didn't attack us. The two of us followed the mist, remaining on high alert.

Something about the plants started to look different, as if we'd entered a different time and space. The bright red fruit of the trees looked like gems, and the leaves seemed to have been altered in some way. Despite the dense rows of trees, the trunks all glowed faintly, giving the area a dream-like atmosphere. We followed the straight path until we reached a clearing.

"Amelia!!"

We arrived at the sight of Amelia and the Second Expeditionary Squadron members being tied up with vines.

Amelia's entire body was wrapped up and strung up from a thick branch. Liselotte was bound and laid sideways on top of a large, flat mushroom. Vice Captain Velrey had her arms tied behind her back as she hung from a tree and Ulgus was wrapped up completely like a cocoon, left to lie out on a big tree stump. Garr was tied around a tree with vines that stopped him from moving an inch. Captain Ludtink had his arms and legs tied together and was strung upside down. I worried about his blood circulation, though strangely, his face didn't look particularly pale.

Everyone was completely limp. They didn't appear to be conscious. I didn't see any external wounds on them, but their clothes were tattered. It was painful just to look at them in that state. Were they really okay?

"Are you visitors?"

The light gathered at a single point, causing something big to appear.

"I-It's the...!"

Once the light dispersed, its true form was revealed.

"That's...not a water fin crocodile, is it?"

It had a body like a lizard, blue scales covering its entire length, a long tail, and fins. I could sense intelligence dwelling in those green eyes. It had a majesty to it that made me want to kneel down. It only took me one look to tell that this wasn't a monster.

The giant water fin crocodile (maybe?) remained composed as it looked down at us.

"I am no monster. I am Nero Shilwa, the great spirit."

This was, apparently, a great spirit of the water and forest. Perhaps the tradesman had witnessed none other than Nero Shilwa. That would definitely explain why he mistook it for a giant dragon.

"Um, oh wise, intelligent, and generous great spirit, Lord Nero Shilwa, I wish to ask you why you've tied these people up." The answer to this question would

drastically change how we negotiated. I decided to ask, feeling that it could do no harm.

Nero Shilwa squinted and sighed. I thought it might ignore my question, but then...

"It's no big deal, I simply wanted to add to my followers."

"F-Followers...?"

Zara and I exchanged looks.

It appeared that the great spirit Nero Shilwa had imprisoned our squadmates out of pure self-indulgence. It even said that it attacked us to steal our weapons.

I'm sorry for ever thinking you disturbed the forest, Magic Research Bureau. I apologized to them in my head.

"The rabbit girl will do nicely too."

"Huh?!"

Vines suddenly sprouted from the ground and wrapped around my body. They slithered toward Nero Shilwa, taking me with them.

"Melly!!"

"Eeeeeek!!"

I found myself being hung from a low tree in what felt like a single second. Something about this felt familiar. At least I wasn't upside down this time. No, nothing about being strung up was "good."

I just felt so foolish to end up in this situation.

Well, seeing how Captain Ludtink, Garr, and Vice Captain Velrey had also been captured, I knew there would be no point in trying to resist.

Vines shot out at Zara too, but he severed them with a swing of his magic ax. The pieces wriggled on the ground. Zara stomped on them and glared at Nero Shilwa.

"Do not resist. This land bends to my will. I can grow as many vines as I please."

Zara continued to slash through each vine that crept his way. He looked to have the situation under control for now, but I knew he would be captured as soon as he ran out of stamina.

Being squeezed by vines made me feel weaker each time. I was starting to fade into unconsciousness. I knew it had to be draining my stamina and magical energy.

“Correct, rabbit girl.”

“Huh?!”

Did it just read my mind?!

“Correct yet again, rabbit girl!”

I wished it wouldn't try to converse with my inner dialogue. I didn't like the name “rabbit girl” one bit either.

Nero Shilwa began to laugh with its whole body after hearing my mental retorts. *“Human thought is so delightful. I never tire of it.”*

“Um, you're just trying to get followers, not kill us, right...?”

“Incorrect. I extract the forces that power humans and replace it with my own. That is how they become my followers. However, these people are stubborn and will not accept my power. If I leave them now, they will die.”

“What?! Oh no...!”

With this shocking discovery, Zara approached Nero Shilwa and raised his battle ax.

“You are skilled to escape my vines.”

Instead of dodging, Nero Shilwa allowed Luxuria to strike it.

Clang! I heard what sounded like metal against metal. The creature didn't appear to be damaged by it. Then I realized something. It felt like the vines were loosening around me. When I looked down, I noticed that Sly's magic jar was generating heat.

Were vines hindered by heat?

Sly had to be producing heat thanks to the bathwater she drank before we

came here. This might be the key we needed to save everyone.

The great spirit paid us no attention, while Zara kept it distracted. I twisted my body now that it was slightly freed up and unscrewed Sly's lid.

"Sly, get Captain Ludtink first."

She grew a tentacle and saluted me, accepting my orders. Then she hopped away with a huge leap. She managed to reach the upside-down Captain Ludtink and stick to him.

You can do it, Sly!!

"Oh?"

I glanced at Nero Shilwa and quieted my thoughts.

"Yes, handsome man. I will give you an amenity if you become my follower."

"Handsome man" had to be Zara. It was an accurate description, unlike my nickname of "rabbit girl."

A magic circle formed on the ground when Nero Shilwa stomped down, causing Zara to retreat. A single thin tree emerged from the circle. It was growing bright red fruit that looked exactly like forest apples.

"This is a fruit you may give to another to make them fall in love with you. You want this, don't you?"

"What did you just say?" Zara's voice came out deeper than I'd ever heard it before.

"You have a girl you are fond of, no?"

"I don't need your fruit. There's no point in being with her if I don't put in the effort to make her love me back!" With that declaration, Luxuria suddenly lit up.

A magic circle formed, and when Zara took a step inside it, a fissure appeared in the ground. This could be none other than the power of Luxuria, the magic ax.

"What?!"

The ground wobbled and split apart.

Luxuria possessed a mighty strength. Nero Shilwa lost its balance and fell to the ground.

Zara first split the forest apple in two. Then he dashed toward the great spirit and stuck Luxuria inside its mouth, as the one place not covered in scales on its body. Zara informed it that he would twist his ax and cut its mouth open if it moved.



“So, what’s the plan?”

“D-Damn this ax...”

Just after that, I heard the sound of something heavy hitting the ground. Captain Ludtink had just been freed from his vines.

“...Damn, my body hurts!”

Captain Ludtink awoke much quicker than I expected. He stood right up and glared around at his surroundings as if to get a grasp on the situation. Then he unsheathed Superbia, his magic sword.

“I’m killin’ this thing!!”

He ran at Nero Shilwa to attack. Zara put a stop to that.

“Wait, Captain! You can’t attack it!”

“Move, Zara. I’m killin’ it!!”

“No! You can’t! It’s a spirit!”

“I don’t care! This selfish little wretch is goin’ down!!”

I could tell that a lot must have happened before the members were tied up. Well, I understood how they felt... I had an idea. I probably needed to scream “Captain Ludtink’s gone deranged!” like Ulgus. I just didn’t have the strength left in me for that.

“Um...” I suggested a plan amidst the tense mood. “I have a present that will make a wonderful follower for the great spirit.”

“Hmm?”

This was how the rest of my squadmates came to be freed.



“KREEEEEEH! Kreeeeeee!”

As soon as she regained consciousness, Amelia threw herself against me with all her strength. She was certainly adorable, but her showing of love was a little intense. I was just glad to see she was all right.

Liselotte was still half-unconscious due to how much magical energy she’d

lost. Vice Captain Velrey, who had to prop her up, looked pretty pale too.

Ulgus was in a similar state. I let him use Gula as a walking stick.

Garr was standing up like normal, but his tail seemed a bit more limp than usual. Sly was so very happy to be reunited with Garr.

It was strange how, once freed from their vines, every last one of them immediately charged at Nero Shilwa and shouted that they were going to kill it, just like Captain Ludtink. It was almost like a manifestation of his bandit powers.

I ended up giving the river turtle I made with Gula to Nero Shilwa. I took it out of the bag to show it to the great spirit, but then...

“Whoa! Look out!”

I ended up dropping the turtle on the ground when it tried to snap at me.

When it looked at the river turtle, Nero Shilwa muttered to itself. *“I see. It is lively.”*

The river turtle skittered toward Nero Shilwa with surprising speed.

“Hmm. A river dweller, huh? Good, good. Come to me.”

Nero Shilwa seemed to have taken a liking to the spirited turtle. That was a big relief. The spirit returned all our belongings too. The black mist spirits had apparently gone as far as to retrieve my food items that fell down the cliff.

Nothing made me happier than having my pot back.

Now satisfied with its follower, Nero Shilwa simply apologized for the trouble and immediately disappeared.

It was over. Finally, it was all over.

I wanted to get home as soon as possible, but hunger had robbed me of my strength...

The first thing I did was feed Amelia fruit. She'd kept her bag fastened on her back even when she was tied up. I teared up as I watched her enjoying her meal of fruit. My next task was to make us some food of our own.

“Ulgus, please lend me your walking stick for a moment.”

I gripped Gula once it was returned to me. A faint magic circle began to form.

“Whoa! What is that thing, Medic Risurisu?”

“This is the power of Gula. It’s able to create food items.”

“Wow, that’s incredible!”

“Although, all it can make are river turtles.”

“Ah, I see...”

I really never wanted to eat a river turtle again, but it *was* the perfect food to restore energy for the completely haggard squadron. I selected “river turtle” from the three identical options and began to cook. Sly provided the water to cook with. Everyone was shocked to learn of her secret power.

I spawned three or four turtles which didn’t come out alive this time. I cocked my head in confusion, but proceeded to clean and drain the river turtles to cook with. First, I covered the turtle meat in spices and kneaded them in. I was extra thorough to be sure no odor remained. Then I covered the meat in flour and fried it up in a bit of oil. My fried turtle meat was complete.

“Please have some. It will make you feel better.”

The river turtle also contained my magical energy, which would surely be good for their health. But no one seemed hungry. They didn’t take a single bite.

“Then allow me to give it a try.” Zara volunteered to try it first. I suggested he eat it with some of the citrus juice that Sly produced for us. “...Ah, it’s really good,” Zara murmured his remarks quietly.

Fried river turtle meat tasted like something between fish and poultry. I used to make it for Grandpa to have as a snack with his alcohol.

“The coating is crunchy, but the meat juices come out when you bite down. This one doesn’t even stink at all.” Zara gave his seal of approval.

When he heard all this, Ulgus was next to try a piece. “Whoa, this is so good!” His response was enough for the rest of the unit to begin eating their share too.

I was relieved to see the color return to their faces.

In the end, I took out another dish I’d been quietly making while my

squadmates ate their fried turtle.

“What is that, Medic Risurisu?” Ulgus pointed at the chocolate-colored substance and innocently asked that question.

“It’s blood pudding.”

“What?”

“River turtle blood pudding.”

I mixed the river turtle’s blood with wheat and spices, then cooked it up to solidify it. I was very proud of this dish.

Zara’s story he once shared with me about eating livestock blood had reminded me of its existence, so I decided to give it a try. Ulgus cried out in disgust. I didn’t want him to be a picky eater, so I fed him a bite as a special gesture.

“Urk... Ah! It’s kind of good...”

Despite his resistance, he quieted down the second he tried the blood pudding.

River turtle blood was surprisingly refreshing and lacked any real bad taste. It was also nutritious, which was why I hoped the members would eat some.

Captain Ludtink didn’t want to try it either, but I forced him to eat some.

When I brought a spoonful up to Liselotte’s mouth, she ate it without complaint, although that was perhaps because she had no energy to put up a fight. The model students, Vice Captain Velrey, Garr, and Zara, ate their pudding without any protest.

We rested for a while after the meal, using the time to exchange stories of our time apart. My squadmates had been immediately bound up by the vines, unable to win against the magic the spirits used.

“What happened to your hair, Zara?” Captain Ludtink asked.

“I just wanted to go for a different look.”

“Oh yeah?” Captain Ludtink didn’t press him further. He showed his appreciation for Zara. “I’m sure you had it tough too.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t all peachy for us.” Zara had a smile on his face, but the look in his eyes was a different story. “There’s somewhere I want to stop by on our way home.” Zara asked Captain Ludtink to join him. “You see, a villager who found my weapon was selling it at their store.”

“That’s real low of them.”

“Well, I sort of get why they did it.”

Zara was born and raised in a snowy, isolated village. It was near the border between countries, meaning refugees fleeing their nations sometimes came to that village seeking help.

“The people who reached our village were the lucky ones...”

It wasn’t unusual for them to find skeletons in the forest when springtime came. They belonged to people who had wandered through the dense, unrelenting snow and perished before they could reach the village.

“My parents taught me to bury those people whenever I found them.”

They told him to only put their bones and clothes in the ground and to bring back anything else like metal, since it would interfere with nature.

“I would take the metal things like knives and accessories back and sell them to traders.” He explained that swords and knives were sometimes just sitting on the ground in the forest. These belonged to the refugees too. “I was really happy to take them home and sell them.”

That was how they were able to put meat on the table. Zara explained how this was a normal thing in their village that they did to survive.

“I feel like it’s completely normal to sell things from the ground in a village that doesn’t have knights like this. Everyone’s just doing their best to get by.” So that was why Zara remained so calm even when he found Luxuria being resold in a shop right before his very eyes. “Despite all that, the villagers don’t steal from each other, and they understand right from wrong.”

The shopkeeper must have purchased it without knowing anything about it. That was why Zara had planned to forget about the incident at the general store, until...

“But actually, that shop was selling illegal drugs.”

“They were what?!”

“And so brazen about it too. The shopkeeper didn’t seem the slightest bit spooked when we told him we were knights.”

“He’s not some sort of idiot, right?”

“Nope. He had a good eye for quality.”

“I see.” Captain Ludtink muttered about the possibility of a more powerful person secretly being behind such a shop. “I’m pissed, so let’s go mess that guy up.”

“Excuse me?”

It didn’t sound like the sort of thing a legitimate knight would ever say. I looked at the other members’ expressions.

Ulgus had an innocent smile on his face. Garr was wagging his tail from side to side. He seemed to be in good spirits. Sly was sitting on Garr’s shoulder and punching her fists in the air, apparently preparing for a fight. Liselotte squinted her eyes, looking like she was ready to kill. She seemed to be in poor spirits. Vice Captain Velrey was expressionless. I didn’t get the sense that she was going to put a stop to Captain Ludtink.

Zara twirled Luxuria around in his hands. He was ready to kill...no, to bring some justice. Amelia spread her wings and let out a deep cry. She was eager to take care of business too.

Was I the only one who didn’t want to go through with this?

Wouldn’t it be better to report to our superiors first and have a search conducted? We didn’t know who was behind this drug operation, so shouldn’t we be a bit more secretive for now? Was I the only one thinking these things?!

“Um... Guys...why are you so...?”

I knew the answer would only be “Because we’re pissed” like Captain Ludtink.

Was that really okay to act on? No, it certainly wasn’t.

“It’s fine. I’ll allow it.” Captain Ludtink was clear and concise.

“It’s fine? You’re gonna punch the shopkeeper?”

“Yeah, let’s give him a good punch. I’ll take full responsibility.”

“I’ll...punch the shopkeeper too.”

“That’s the spirit.”

With that, I’d received punching permission from Captain Ludtink too, so we headed out to deliver justice to the shopkeeper of the general store.



EVERYONE had regained some color in their faces, perhaps because of the river turtle. They seemed to be in better spirits too. But that only meant they’d become that much more violent. They were in *too* good of spirits.

We rode our horses from the forest to the village.

A male villager shrieked when he caught sight of Captain Ludtink in his worn-out clothes.

“What’s with you?”

“P-P-Please allow me to live! I have a wife and aging parents to care for!!”

“Take me to your mayor.”

“Huh?”

It appeared that the captain was going to get permission to go on his rampage. What a courteous bandit. I would expect nothing less.

We went to the mayor’s house to discuss the general store.

Amelia waited outside with Garr since she wasn’t allowed to go in. Sly hopped onto my shoulder. I wondered if she was at the age where she liked to listen to conversations between adults.

Captain Ludtink’s stubble and ragged clothes didn’t exactly make him look like a knight, but the mayor still believed his story. We were lucky he was a kind man. Captain Ludtink asked him for information about the general store.

“You see, we’ve been just as concerned about that place...” He explained that the store was set up three years earlier. The village had been a peaceful place

until that point when scary-looking visitors began to pass through. “That shop sells everything for extreme prices and the shopkeeper is extremely rude, even to villager customers. I’ve tried to reason with him many times, but it’s a hopeless situation.”

“I see.”

The village had never had its own general store before. They always asked passing traders to supply anything they needed, which was very inconvenient, as orders took anywhere from a week to ten days to fill. They were delighted at the arrival of their first general store, but now, it was nothing more than a headache to the villagers.

“Why didn’t you consult the Royal Order for help?”

“I simply never thought that any knights would come to such a remote area...”

“Knights’ll go anywhere. That’s our job as an expeditionary squadron.”

“I see...”

As much as I didn’t want to admit it, I couldn’t help but think how cool Captain Ludtink sounded.

“Well? Got all that?”

“Of course.”

Vice Captain Velrey gave the proper response. Ulgus asked the very troubling question of, “I can’t use poison arrows, right?”

“Numbing arrows are fine.”

“Understood!”

You’re actually letting him use those?! I shouted back at the captain inside my mind.

“May I use spells, Captain Ludtink?”

“You can attack with magic if anyone gets knocked out. Just do little spells, though.”

“Roger.” Liselotte was fired up too.

Sly pumped her fists, all ready to do some fighting, but then Captain Ludtink told her to stay in her jar. She looked depressed until...

“It’s not something worth troubling you over.” The captain had a very serious look on his face. Sly seemed to accept that explanation when she heard it.

With that, we were given our battle plan.

Zara and I would go to the general store and ask the shopkeeper to show his business permit to us. We knew he didn’t have one, so that would be what we arrested him for.

“Just don’t start a fuss, got it?”

Despite this warning, Captain Ludtink’s terrifying face made him less than convincing. It was getting late, so we decided to spend the night at the same inn Zara and I had stayed at.



THE next morning, it was time for battle.

With Sly in her magic jar hanging from my neck, Zara and I headed for the dusty general store once more. Everyone took their positions. Once we were ready...Zara and I entered the shop and began the inspection.

“...Huh?” The shopkeeper, looking displeased, asked us to repeat ourselves.

“We’re asking you to show us your business permit.”

It appeared that Captain Ludtink had been right about the store operating without a permit. The shopkeeper didn’t budge. When we told him this was illegal, he insisted that the mayor had given him permission to run the store.

“Please go to the royal capital’s business department to receive an inspection.”

“I told you, I have permission from the village mayor!”

“The mayor told us he came to you and asked for improvements many times, but since you won’t listen to him, now he wants you out.”

“Shut your mouth, sissy boy!!”

Zara adjusted his weapon slightly when the shopkeeper screamed at him,

causing the man to flinch. “Aside from the permit, that bag of plants you have there is full of illegal drugs, isn’t it?”

“This...is red tea!”

“Liar.”

“I’m not lying. What proof do you have?”

“Then I’ll buy all of it off you if you’ll agree to burn the plants inside and inhale all the smoke. How about it?”

“You... You don’t have the money for that!”

Zara removed the leather bag of gold coins from his belt and slammed it on the countertop.

“No way.”

I followed up with a “No way” of my own after the shopkeeper. That money could only belong to Captain Ludtink.

“All right, go ahead and prove yourself.”

“Ngh...”

He wanted the money, but didn’t want to smoke the leaves to prove he was innocent. It was written all over his face.

“C’mon now. Get a move on.”

“Damn it!” The shopkeeper grabbed the bag of coins and screamed out. “Hey, get out here! There are knights poking around! Kill ’em!”

We heard the thumping of footsteps. It appeared he had friends hiding upstairs.

Zara and I sprinted out of the general store.

“Hey!”

“Get back here!”

A group of scary-looking men chased after us. They emerged from the shop and came face to face with us. It was better for Zara to use the full strength of his weapon outside of the shop.

There were ten men in total.

Now I understood that the shopkeeper wasn't scared of knights showing up because he knew he had so many people on his side.

But we weren't on our own either.

"Boss, there's just two of 'em."

"Got it."

The large man they called "boss" came out of the general store...but as soon as he set foot on the outside, Captain Ludtink jumped off the building's roof and flattened him.

"Grah!"

"Boss!"

"Aaaaahhh!!"

That had been the signal to engage.

Garr jumped down next and knocked down the foes with his spear. Vice Captain Velrey, Ulgus, and Liselotte gathered near Zara. Ulgus fired arrows at the men's weapons, causing them to drop them one by one. As always, his aim was impressive.

Vice Captain Velrey managed to take out enemies at close range without even using her blades. Liselotte created an orb of light to stun the men. I got on Amelia's back and flew up into the air.

"Oof!"

"Kreeeh!"

Amelia seemed pleased with this development, but I didn't like the idea of riding her without a saddle...in fact, I was terrified that I was going to fall off! When we flew through the air, I spotted a suspicious figure outside the back of the general store. It was the shopkeeper.

"Hey! Don't move!"

"Kreh kreh kreeeh!"

Amelia went into a sharp dive. She rammed her body against the shopkeeper.

“Aaaargh!”

He was sent tumbling into a tree with which he collided.

“Hold still and let me tie you up, please!”

“Kreh!”

He’d removed a knife from his pocket and was holding it out toward me, so I responded by holding up Gula too.

“Kreh!”

“Whoa!”

Amelia sprinted at him with shocking speed, causing the shopkeeper to lose his balance.

“Now’s my chance!!”

“Aaaahhh!!”

I brought Gula crashing down on his skull with all my might. The shopkeeper collapsed where he sat. I used the opportunity to tie up his arms and legs.

The shopkeeper and his crew were officially under arrest.

We took them to a town with a knights’ base and handed over custody of the men.

With that, the case was concluded.

How wonderful the bright, blue sky felt!

I was downright ecstatic about our overwhelming victory.

Side Story: Amelia's Second Squadron Observation Log

oo/xx

THE Second Enoch Squadron is as serene today as ever.

The one exception being Captain Ludtink's face.

Even just a bit ago, two passing knights were gossiping. *"Did you see Captain Ludtink? He looks like he committed a triple homicide this morning before coming to work..."*

Crow Ludtink, the captain of the second squadron, was usually expressionless, but his wrinkled brow made his face look incredibly intimidating. He also had sharp, glaring eyes, and his chiseled features were particularly rugged. His voice was deep too, and he was so tall you had to crane your neck to look up at him. God had blessed the captain with quite a few frightening features.

But Captain Ludtink was only actually a young man at the age of twenty. He also had his own burdens to struggle with.

For some reason, he was talking to me today.

"Hey, Amelia."

"Kreh?"

"Is my face really that scary?"

I didn't know how to respond to such a question. If I was a heartless griffin, I would tell him yes. But for better or worse, I cared about people. I should probably tell him "It's not the kind of face that pleases everyone." That was when Mama Mell and Ulgus arrived.

"I'm back, Captain."

"Me too."

The two had apparently been out baking bread. The heap of freshly baked bread in their basket gave off the appetizing aroma of butter.

“Good work today, Captain! You look as tough as always, I see.” Ulgus was saying a little too much. Captain Ludtink’s tough face only grew in intensity thanks to that comment.

Mama Mell was the one to protest Ulgus’s thoughtless remark. “Ulgus, looking tough is a good thing for a knight. I’m jealous of Captain Ludtink’s face.”

It was true that Mama Mell tended to be called a “Puny elf knight” by the jerks in town. But once they spotted me, they always ran away.

After Ulgus left, Mama Mell handed the captain some of their bread, acting as if nothing had happened. She said she wanted him to try it. With a dazed expression, like he’d totally lost his spirit, Captain Ludtink accepted the bread. He took a bite. A faint smile came to his face, maybe because the bread was just that good.

Mama Mell grinned too.

...I didn’t know how to put it, exactly, but if Captain Ludtink wasn’t engaged, well, this could have been a very different moment.

Good for you, Zara.

Not that I’ll say what I mean by that.

oo/△△

IT’S sunny outside today. The morning was pleasant, but that was before a fuss broke out in the hall of the barracks.

“You thief! You stole my man!”

“*Your* man?! He’s mine!”

It seemed like two maids were fighting over a knight. They yanked each other’s hair in what was turning into an ugly dispute. The knight in question simply watched on helplessly. *Can’t you put a stop to them?* I wondered.

Knights were gathered around the scene, but everyone was too put off to act. *Come on! Just stop them already!* I wished they would do the job they were actually hired for. They were clearly shuddering at the sight. Not a single knight was brave enough to de-escalate things.

Mama Mell and Zara looked perplexed. They remarked that they probably wouldn't come out unscathed if they tried to intervene. True, I could just picture the maids scratching at them.

No one could stop the maids now. But just when I'd given up hope, a certain gallant knight appeared.

"What are you two up to?"

The slender knight with black hair and blue eyes was Anna Velrey.

The maids had recently conducted a survey of the top three knights they most wanted to marry. Even over the popular Silvester Aurelia, who guarded the second-born prince, our Vice Captain Velrey was right at the top of the list.

It appeared the vice captain knew these maids. She stepped in between them. "What on earth happened here?"

"Lady Anna! This girl stole my boyfriend."

"That's not true. Lady Anna, she's the one who stole my boyfriend."

"I see."

Just how was Vice Captain Velrey going to cool this situation down? Even I, a griffin, couldn't help but get excited.

"Calm down, both of you. I'd much rather see your charming smiles than your angry faces."

That single statement from Vice Captain Velrey instantly caused the maids to quiet down. They straightened their messy hair, fidgeted, and blushed. Some of the knights at the scene started to take notes. They probably thought they could use that same line for themselves.

"We can talk about this later. It's almost time for work to start. You don't want to be late, do you?"

"N-No..."

"G-Goodbye..."

As if nothing had ever happened at all, the maids bowed politely and left the scene. Finally, the vice captain had a stern warning for the knight who caused

the fight.

“I’ll be reporting this incident to my superiors. Tell me your name, unit, and rank.”

“Y-Yes, ma’am...”

With that, the incident in the hall came to a peaceful ending. Vice Captain Velrey, the handsome and talented fighter. She was an unmistakable knight in shining armor and an ideal knight to all women.

XX/oo

GARR GARR always marched to the beat of his own drum. He was a young beastfolk with the head of a wolf, a strong body, and fluffy red fur. He was the oldest of the squadron and very untalkative, but everyone relied on him all the same.

Garr was kind to me too. He always let me use his long, fluffy tail as a pillow.

These days, Sly, the artificial slime, barely ever leaves the side of his friend Garr. Sly was the creation of that freak from the Magic Research Bureau, who was misusing the factory budget. He was made with mass amounts of magic stones and gems and had become the strongest of all slimes. Although only Sly’s creator, the currently detained freak, knew the details.

Sly was closer to a ghost than a monster in terms of substance. This was probably largely in part to his proximity to the good-natured Garr. If the freak from the Magic Research Bureau had raised him, he definitely would have grown into an evil monster. I was so glad that Garr took him in. Not that any of them had realized Sly’s true power.

Mama Mell fed Sly some fruit juice, watching over him with a smile. Garr watched over both of them in turn.

Today was another serene day for our unit.

△△/XX

JUNE Ulgus was the most normal boy in the world. It made sense that he was seventeen years old. It might be more accurate to describe him as a young man, but for whatever reason, it was hard to settle on either word. He wanted to be popular with girls, just like anyone else, but he never once flirted with the maids like the more outgoing knights.

“Aww man... I wish I was popular...”

I didn’t know how to respond to those muttered words. His short hair gave off a clean-cut impression. His eyes were somewhat charming, and his body had some decent muscles built up. He wasn’t unattractive. It didn’t seem unthinkable that he would be popular with girls...

“Girls don’t go for archers at all...”

It appeared that a knight’s choice of weapon was a deciding factor in popularity. That didn’t make much sense to me.

“Whenever I tell them I’m an archer, they always act like that’s so boring...”

By the way, rapiers were said to be the most popular weapon with girls.

“But big swords like the captain’s look boorish to girls, so they don’t like those either.” Ulgus muttered about how he should have chosen a weapon that girls liked more.

It seemed like a very trivial problem to have.



ZARA had feelings for Mama Mell. But he was too squeamish to tell her that. His feelings seemed to be getting the better of him lately. He was struggling to keep them in check.

Despite her looks, Mama Mell was popular with boys. Elves were supposed to be tall beauties. Growing up amongst so many people like that, Mama Mell thought very poorly of her looks.

But to the men of the capital city, she was quite the cute girl.

Zara was made uneasy by how quick she was to show love and respect for anyone. On top of that, Mama Mell always gave Zara and Zara alone her most innocent smiles. This resulted in him being distraught, totally unsure of her

intentions.

I felt that Mama Mell was probably keeping all sorts of feelings under a tight lid. It was possible that she did sense his interest in her, but pretended not to notice so that it didn't interfere with their work. We may be bound by a contract, but it's not as if we share what's in each other's hearts.

That was how Mama Mell had been for a while, but recently, there's been a change.

She was putting a whole lot of thought into whether or not she should wear lipstick to work. I knew that the girl closest to her in age—Liselotte—probably had a big part in that change.

Mama Mell also had a special kind of trust she placed in Zara. Although, he hadn't noticed that at all.

In their current state, I hoped for Zara to take his time and keep putting effort in. Little did he know that it was even more painful to be the one watching over them.

You can do it, Zara!

oo/oo

LISELOTTE Lichtenberger loved mythical beasts. She was completely spellbound whenever I was within sight. She had long purple hair and wore silver-rimmed glasses over her purple, foxlike eyes. Liselotte had curves in all the right places too. She was the very beautiful daughter of a marquess.

They say that children follow in the footsteps of their parents, and I doubted there was a more intense example than Liselotte. Ignoring her obsession with mythical beasts, however, she was a perfectly nice girl. I was very glad she became friends with Mama Mell.

However, wasn't she at a marriageable age for a noblewoman?

She showed no interest in attending balls, nor did her father appear to be searching for a husband for her. I didn't understand why, exactly. The worthless knights never attempted to hit on Liselotte. Maybe they were just scared of the marquess. It was also possible that the high-class air to her scared them off.

Something a bit amusing happened recently.

Silvester Auriela, guard of the second-born prince and second on the list of “Top 3 Knights We Most Want To Marry” went out of his way to hit on Liselotte. He had blonde hair and blue, sleepy eyes. He was handsome, but also a terrible playboy. Silvester was also the second son of an earl. He was probably eager to be the son-in-law of a marquess.

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am Silvester Auriela.”

“Okay.”

“.....”

“.....”

And then the conversation just ended! Liselotte had no interest in him whatsoever.

“Y-You see, I’m part of the imperial guard for the second-born prince.”

She turned her head away.

Wow, she’s ignoring him. That’s so mean! You’ve got ice in your veins, Liselotte!

But in truth, she was always like this when it didn’t involve mythical beasts.

Silvester Aurelia was at a loss for how to get her interested. I was actually impressed that he had yet to give up. That was when Vice Captain Velrey and Mama Mell showed up.

“What do you think you’re doing?!” Vice Captain Velrey snapped at the male knight.

Liselotte suddenly got an upset look on her face, then rushed over to the vice captain and clung to her.

“...I was really scared.”

But weren’t you just totally snubbing him?

Liselotte certainly was hard-headed.

Vice Captain Velrey pulled her close, giving Liselotte a squeeze as she glared

at Silvester Aurelia. Mama Mell was also wary of this new knight. She grabbed the vice captain's sleeve.

"N-Not you again! Anna Velrey!" he boomed.

"Huh? We've never met before."

"Just be quiet already!!"

Silvester Aurelia, practically in tears, went running off.

I felt a little bit bad for him, but it wasn't right to hit on people in the workplace, either... In the end, I figured he was just reaping what he sowed.

oo/◇◇

CHARLOTTE and Mama Mell really got along well. They always ran into each other's arms as soon as they saw each other. I pretended that I never heard Ulgus whisper "I'm jealous..." whenever he witnessed it.

Charlotte was a hard-working girl who never gave up, even in a strange foreign land. But she had a surprising side to her: how strongly she was able to bond with the bandit...I mean, Captain Ludtink.

Once again, today, she greeted the captain with a big smile when he returned from his meeting. "Captain Bandit!"

"Hey."

Captain Ludtink, being who he was, kindly accepted the way she addressed him.

"Guess what! I made some delicious tea for you, Captain Bandit, because you've worked so hard."

"Then let's have it with Velrey too. I just got some sweets from the captain of another unit."

"Yaaay!"

"There aren't very many, so be sure not to tell the others. Got it?"

"Okay!"

The pair were like a big brother and little sister who really loved each other.

Today was another harmonious experience here with the second squadron.

Side Story: First Time at the Marketplace and Smoked Great Salmon

CHARLOTTE had already been with the second squadron for a whole month. She spent her mornings sweeping the outside of the barracks.

“Mell! Good morning!”

“Good morning, Charlotte. You sure are working hard first thing.”

“Wind was strong yesterday. Many leaves fell.”

“Yes, I can see that.”

Charlotte’s ears perked up and her tail wagged while she spoke to me. It was a show of how much energy she had.

“Good morning too, Amelia!”

“Kreh kreh!”

She gave Amelia a hug. It was such a heartwarming sight.

“Ah, Papa Garr!” She’d spotted Garr next. Charlotte ran up to greet him.

Her family description for each member was still in use. Garr was the dad, Zara was the mom, Vice Captain Velrey the big sister, Ulgus the little brother, Liselotte the little sister, and Captain Ludtink the bandit. One of those things wasn’t like the other, but it wasn’t the sort of thing worth focusing on.

“Good morning, Papa Garr!”

Garr looked at Charlotte with a gentle expression. As soon as she tried to wrap her arms around him, he lifted her up into the air like a little kid. Garr really acted like a great father. He even shared the same fluffy, pointy ears that Charlotte had, making them look even more like a family.

“Ah, June!” Ulgus was next to arrive, so Charlotte went to greet him. “Good morning, June.”

“Good morning.” Ulgus returned the greeting politely, even though he was

being addressed without honorifics by a younger colleague.

“Did you sleep well last night?”

“I did, thanks.”

“Good for June!” As she said that, Charlotte stood up on her tiptoes to pat Ulgus’s head. He looked really happy when she did.

“Having a big sister rules,” he said under his breath. I could tell he’d completely accepted his role as Charlotte’s little brother and was enjoying the relationship.

Next up was Vice Captain Velrey.

“Good morning, Charlotte.”

“Good morning, Big Sister Anna.”

“You seem lively today.”

Vice Captain Velrey flashed an attractive smile. It was a rare and precious sight. The vice captain started to smile more ever since Charlotte joined us. I knew the girl had a therapeutic effect on all the members.

“Morning to you too, Medic Risurisu.”

“Good morning. You look lovely as ever!” When I said that to her, she smiled at me too.

“Ah, Mama Zara!”

It appeared Zara was the next to arrive.

“Good morning, Mama Zara!”

“Good morning, Charlotte.” He opened up his arms to her and she leapt right into them.

“Mama Zara, you are pretty today. And smell good...”

I agreed with that. Zara baked sweets and knitted wonderful clothes for Charlotte. He really was the perfect mother.

“I brought you a ribbon I made, Charlotte.”

“Wow!”

Zara tied the ribbon around the collar of Charlotte's work uniform.

The white ribbon stood out nicely against the navy uniform. It even had flowers embroidered on the ends with silver thread. Flashy outfits weren't allowed, but you couldn't spot the flowers unless you were very close to her. Zara was as clever as always.

Charlotte's eyes lit up. I could tell she liked it. Her ears twitched, like she just couldn't calm down again.

"That's great, Charlotte. It looks so cute on you."

"Thanks! Thank you too, Mama Zara. I'm so, sooo happy!"

"I'm glad you like it."

Charlotte ran off into the barracks to look at the ribbon in the mirror.

"Thanks for doing that, Zara."

"It was nothing. I'm just pleased as punch to have someone who likes the things I make as a hobby."

Zara was as good at needlework as any craftsman. He made things like handkerchiefs and accessory cases for me too. He even told me that he occasionally sold his wares at a charity bazaar held by the family of Count Everhart—the family caring for Blanche.

"Let me know the next time you set up a booth. I'd like to come buy something there."

"Is there anything you want, Melly?"

"Well... I'd like something cute like the ribbon you made for Charlotte."

"Is that right...?" Zara suddenly stared off into the distance. His face made it look like he was deciding whether or not to say something.

"Is something wrong, Zara?"

"Huh?"

It felt too forward to ask if he had something to tell me.

I stared at Zara, whose eyes were darting all over the place, when he suddenly

began to fumble around in his jacket pocket. When he removed his hand, he was holding a ribbon similar to the one he gave Charlotte.

“I-I made this for you, Melly. I don’t know if you even want it, though...”

“Wow! It’s so cute! There are even more details than Charlotte’s ribbon. It’s for my hair, isn’t it?”

“That’s right.”

It was actually two ribbons which I quickly tied into my hair. The ends had embroidered flowers too, but they were subtle enough to wear at work. Now I knew why Charlotte wanted to look at herself in the mirror. As eager as I was, I decided to ask Zara for his impression first.

“What do you think, Zara?”

“Huh?! It’s—” Just as Zara was about to say something, a giant shadow loomed over him from behind.

“Morning, you two. What’re you talking about out here?”

It was...the resident bandit of the expeditionary squadron... No, it was Captain Ludtink.

“Look at you all dressed up, Risurisu. Are you going to a party in the forest?”

“No, I’m not!”

Zara had to drag the smirking captain away.

“Ow, Zara! Knock it off! Damn, you’re strong!”

“Let’s hurry, before we’re late to the morning meeting.”

“Owww! There’s still thirty minutes!”

Zara dragged him away like the captain was a prisoner.

Thank goodness that Zara was here.

Captain Ludtink enjoyed teasing me. I never knew what to do about that man.



TODAY was shopping day. I’d been hoping to finally take Charlotte along with me on the trip.

“Will you stay here and wait for us, Amelia?”

“Kreh kreh?”

She squinted her eyes and asked “*Why?*” in a deep voice.

“I’m taking Charlotte today, so I won’t be able to look after you. I’ll be sure to bring you back a souvenir, so please be a good girl and wait here with Garr.”

“Kreh.”

She seemed to accept that. I felt a weight lifted off me.

Garr took Amelia and the two of them walked back to the barracks. Amelia kept looking back at me, which made my heart ache slightly, but this simply had to be done for safety reasons.

Charlotte didn’t like crowds. That was something mentioned in the report given to us when she joined the second squadron. I knew she must have psychological trauma from that packed ship she was put on when the slavers captured her. But it was time that she started learning how to get accustomed to the town.

We weren’t going to the crowded marketplace today, but to a more vacant shopping district instead. Fortunately, Zara said he wanted to join us this time. I knew that must be reassuring for Charlotte to hear too.

She was spending her morning cleaning the windows. I called out to her as she worked. “Charlotte, let’s go shopping today.”

“Shopping?”

“There’s a lot of stores. It’s really fun. Zara’s coming too.”

“I go with Mell and Mama Zara?”

“That’s right.”

Charlotte was excited. She raced off to the break room to prepare.

When she returned, she was wearing a cape with a hood attached. It was both big enough to hide her perky ears and also made with lace fringe for a very cute, fashionable look.

“Wow, Charlotte! I love that cape.”

“Me too! Mama Zara make it for me.”

“That’s Zara’s work? He’s so talented.”

She explained that Zara made it to cover her ears in town so as not to attract attention.

“My ears might not stand out either if I had a hood like that.” I peered into her hood to see how it was made, but Charlotte suddenly started to giggle.

“Mell, braid tickle me.”

“Ah, I’m sorry.”

I’d gotten too close. The tip of my braid was ticking Charlotte’s face.

“What’s wrong, Melly?”

That was when Zara arrived. He had clearly witnessed my suspicious actions.

“Nothing’s wrong. I just wanted to see how Charlotte’s cape was made, since it’s so cute.”

“Oh yeah? I’d be happy to tell you how to make it some other time.”

“Are you sure?”

“But of course.”

The sight of Charlotte, incredibly eager for the trip ahead, brought me out of that conversation.

“We’re all ready, so let’s get going.”

“Yeah! Let’s go!”

Zara reached out and took Charlotte’s hand. They were going to walk there hand in hand. A warm feeling spread in my heart. They were just so adorable.



“WOOOOW!”

Charlotte was staring up at the clock tower in the town square as she let out that cry of awe.

“That’s called a clock tower, Charlotte.”

“Clock tower. It is bigger than trees in my forest!”

“Really? Want to go up there?”

“Up there?”

“You can go to the top of the clock tower.”

Captain Ludtink had given Zara orders to show Charlotte around town.

“Are you okay with heights, Charlotte?”

“Yes, is good. I was very good tree climber!”

“Then let’s go up.”

“Yaaaay!”

Charlotte was so happy, she took off running for the clock tower.

“Whoa! Charlotte, it’s dangerous to run in—” But before I could get my words out, Zara quickly reached his hands out and grabbed her.

“Hyah!”

“Charlotte, you can’t just run off willy-nilly.”

“Okaaay!”

He let her down from his hold. After that, Charlotte took Zara’s hand and the two began to walk.

We purchased tickets to enter the clock tower before going inside.

“Wooooow!”

Her cry of surprise echoed against the walls. The inside of the clock tower contained a spiral staircase that we couldn’t see the top of.

“Mell, let’s go up!”

“R-Right.”

It was dimly lit, and the wind was blowing past us as we climbed one step after another. The stairs were pretty steep too. It felt like I was doing knight’s training.

“Hurry, Mell!”

“Y-Yeah!”

Charlotte was bursting with energy. She marched up the stairs with perfect rhythm. Zara exercised regularly, so he had no trouble either, of course.

We made it to the very top after thirty minutes.

“W-Wow!”

The top of the tower was an observatory deck that gave a full view of the town. The red roofs of the buildings were woven throughout the gray cobblestone roads. It was a beautiful sight.

“It’s so cool! So high! Look at all the houses!”

Charlotte cheered as she looked out from the observatory deck. Zara was looking at her and smiling. But then there was me...

“It’s...higher than I expected.”

“I see people down there!”

“Y-Yeah. There they are.”

“You see, Mell?”

“I saw them when I looked earlier.”

I wasn’t afraid of heights. But I just kept thinking about what it would be like to fall from this height. It was hindering my appreciation of the view.

Charlotte seemed to have gotten her fill of the town scenery. I enjoyed myself a little bit too.

Next up was our main destination—the shopping district.

Charlotte spent the trip asking Zara all kinds of questions.

“What’s that, Mama Zara?”

“It’s a fountain.”

“Can you drink it?”

“The fountain cleans the town water for us.”

I had heard that the fountain in the town square was made with magic stones

inside to purify the water. Zara explained that it was also a way to make the town look nicer. Indeed, the statue of the beautiful goddess pouring out water was a sight to behold. I felt like I could stare at it forever.

One after another, Charlotte continued to ask Zara about everything she saw—merchants carrying large crates, street stalls, street performers, and more. I knew that, having grown up in a forest, each and every sight here must be new to her. I was probably a lot like her before I joined the second squadron.

Finally, we arrived at the shopping district. The streets of this area were lined with shops owned by commoners.

“Charlotte, that’s the bakery over there, and that one’s the sweets shop. Next to it is the grocery store.”

“So many shops here.”

“If you need anything, this is the place you come to get it.”

“Wow!”

The marketplace was having its big sale today, so there was even less traffic in the shopping district. Charlotte was unafraid as she strolled down the street.

“Fish is cheap today, so—”

“Wow! Fishy!”

She reacted in the middle of our conversation. Her tail swung from side to side, and I wondered if she liked fish. This time, she was urging Zara along to go faster, probably because he’d warned her not to take off running. I jogged lightly to keep up with them.

“Whoa! Mell! Mama Zara! Look! A great salmon!”

“It’s big, isn’t it?” I responded.

“Yes, how splendid,” Zara said.

They were selling a great salmon about three feet long. It was cheap too.

“Why is this so cheap?” I asked the fishmonger.

“I was gonna sell it to a high-end store, but out of nowhere, they told me they don’t need it anymore. I don’t have the time to cut it up, and it’s too big to sell,

so I'm lowering the price."

"I see."

"We had great salmon in forest." Charlotte sounded so excited, I wondered if she was wound up by the sight of such a big fish. She was happy to see a fish she recognized from her hometown. "We catch great salmon like this in village, but couldn't eat it all."

"I see."

She explained that they didn't have means of preserving fish in their village.

"I know a way to make fish last longer."

"Eat fish for longer?"

"Exactly."

"Like this? All this?"

"Yes, I can preserve the whole fish," I said.

"Woow!"

The great salmon fell within my budget. I checked with Zara too.

"Sounds good to me!"

With that, I purchased the great salmon in order to preserve and eat it. While Zara was paying the fishmonger, Charlotte and I peered through the window of a nearby general store.

"Take a look, Charlotte. They have cute stuffed animals."

"Wow! Adorable."

We stared inside the store when Charlotte suddenly spun around.

"Hey, what're you two up to? Are you busy right now?"

Two young men had called out to us. I froze, startled.

What's happening? They're dressed like mercenaries, but what do they want from us?

"What? You need something?" Charlotte puffed up.

“Nah, we just came to chat since you two are cute.”

“Cute?”

“Yep! Wanna come have tea with us?”

D-Don't tell me they're trying to "pick us up"!

It was the first time anyone had come up to me like this since I arrived in the royal capital. The female knights at the dorm had talked about this. They didn't know what to do about soldiers and traders who came up to flirt with them, even when they were dressed in their uniforms.

I'd listened to this discussion, feeling lucky that nothing like that ever happened to me, but now it appeared the time had finally come. Unsure of how to respond, the soldier continued to talk.

“I know a place with the best sweets.”

“Sweets!” Charlotte's eyes lit up in excitement.

“Yeah, you got it. Let's go get some sweets.”

“Okay!”

“No, no, no, no, no!” I jumped in front of Charlotte like a shield when the soldier tried to take her hand.

“You're pretty cute too, you know.”

“Huh?” I would normally be embarrassed to be called cute, but all I could do now was remain expressionless and respond, “Is that so?”

“C'mon, let's not just stand around and talk. Wanna head to the shop?”

“Sorry, we're working right now.”

“Window shopping at the general store? You're a knight, aren't you, elf girl?”

“Urk...!”

We were only waiting around for a little bit, but I couldn't deny that they did catch us window shopping...

“Don't worry, we won't tell your boss. Let's just get some dessert.”

“W-We can't do that.”

“I actually know one of the top knights. I could tell him that the two of you were skipping out on work, you know.”

“P-Please don’t.”

“Then come hang out with us.”

“Ah...!”

One of the mercenaries reached his hand out toward me. Frightened, I squeezed my eyes shut, but I never felt his hand connect with me.

I opened my eyes and found myself staring at a tall back.

“What do you think you’re doing?!”

The person growling at them in a menacing tone was...Zara. He was carrying the paper-wrapped, three-foot-long great salmon on his back. Its face was peeking out of the bag just perfectly for our eyes to meet.

“Who’re you? Why’ve you got that massive great salmon on your back?”

“It was really cheap!”

The great salmon still had very clear eyes, so I knew it was fresh and would taste delicious when eaten. That was what came to mind as I stared into its eyes.

“We’re gonna go hang out with these girls. Don’t get in our way, sissy boy!”

“You aren’t giving me a choice!”

“What, don’t tell me this is your girl here.”

“She’s not yours either, is she?”

“Shut your mouth! Just get out of our way!”

“I’m fine right here, thank you very much!” Zara whipped the great fish out and aimed it at the mercenaries.

“Whoa!”

“It stinks!”

“Go ahead and come closer if you wanna give my salmon here a kiss!”

“D-Damn it!”

“We won’t forget this!”

The mercenaries did an about-face and ran away. Zara had used the great salmon to chase them off.

I let out a big sigh.

“Melly, Charlotte, are you okay?”

“I think so... But thank you so much for saving us!”

“You were scared, weren’t you?”

“Just a little. But it’s all right, since you came to the rescue.”

“Are you okay, Charlotte?”

“Yeah, I okay. That man say he give us sweets.”

“You shouldn’t believe him! You can never accept food from strangers.”

“Okay. I understand.”

After that, Zara held the great salmon in one hand and used the other to hold Charlotte’s hand as we went home.

It was a strange sight to watch from behind, but Zara truly looked so cool when he rushed to our rescue.

Thank you, Zara. I expressed my gratitude again deep in my heart.



WE finally made it back to the barracks.

I was still shocked that we were hit on during a shopping trip. The royal capital was just full of surprises.

Charlotte raced off to the office to report to Captain Ludtink. Being approached by those men was scary, but Charlotte didn’t seem bothered by it at all. I was so relieved she had someone there to protect her.

“I’m really sorry, Melly.”

“Huh?”

Zara, still holding the fish, apologized to me.

“I should have finished paying faster.” Zara explained that he’d been trying to haggle with the fishmonger, which delayed him a bit.

“No, it’s perfectly fine. I didn’t realize you bought it for even cheaper!”

“Yep, I really fought hard for it. But that’s why you two got hit on...”

Zara was always thinking about others. I wanted to tell him not to worry about it...I just couldn’t find the right words.

“I’m just surprised that a sorry excuse for an elf like me would ever be hit on by anyone.”

“You’re not a sorry excuse for an elf, Melly. You’re really adorable! Even that ribbon you’re wearing really suits you.”

“What?!”

I felt incredibly shy when I heard Zara call me cute, despite feeling nothing when the mercenaries said the same thing earlier. For some reason, my face instantly turned beet red.

“Ah, um, I mean...thank you.”

I averted my eyes, but that didn’t feel right, so I looked back up at Zara. That was when I noticed Zara was blushing too. He was probably willing to say embarrassing things just to cheer me up. I was grateful, but didn’t really understand it.

Once again, I found myself staring into the eyes of Zara’s fish.

“Ah, I’m sorry. That great salmon must be heavy,” I said.

“It’s fine. I’ll just bring it straight to the kitchen.”

“Thanks for the help.”

That was how our shopping trip came to an end.



I had Charlotte help me take on the process of preserving the great salmon. The first step was to clean the fish together.

“I’m real good at cutting fish!”

“I’d appreciate it, thanks!”

To be honest, cleaning fish wasn’t my finest skill. I decided to let Charlotte instruct me on the process. The first step was to remove the scales. Then I pressed my knife’s blade to it and scraped. Finally, I chopped off the salmon’s head.

“Now put knife in the tail and cut through the stomach.”

“Understood.”

Charlotte skillfully cut open the fish’s stomach and removed its organs.

“There are eggs inside!”

That reminded me—I’d heard that great salmon eggs could be pickled with salt. I would have to try making that later. We continued to cut it into it, washing the blood away as we worked. Charlotte was cleaning the fish with ease, but it was so large, I couldn’t imagine ever being able to clean it by myself.

Charlotte cut the great salmon into boneless filets in no time at all.

“You’re amazing, Charlotte. You cleaned it perfectly.”

“Thanks!”

I decided that the bones, head, and small pieces of meat could be used for a lunch soup. I would preserve the rest of the filets.

“Mell...what do now?”

“We’re going to smoke these pieces.”

“Smoke?”

“That’s right. They’ll last a lot longer that way.”

“Wow! Smoke is amazing!”

“I’ll show you how to do it.”

I needed to prepare salt, sugar, black pepper, and a few medicinal herbs.

“The first thing you do is wipe away the moisture on the outside of the meat, then rub it down thoroughly with salt.” Then I placed weights on the meat to let

them rest in the cooling box. “Now we wait for seven days.”

“Okay!”

I would have to flip the pieces over a few times during that time. It was a real process.

One week later.

“Now it’s time to remove the salt from the salted salmon.”

I soaked the slices of great salmon in cold water for about an hour. Once the salt was washed off, they were ready to dry. Next, I filled a big can with wood chips to smoke them on. It took about two hours.

“Now they just need to rest for a day and they’re ready. But if you dry them even more, it becomes something called saketoba.”

Smoked great salmon was strange in that it became more delicious the longer it was dried.

The next day, Charlotte and I went to check on the finished product.

“Mell, is it smoked now?”

“Yes, this is smoked salmon now.”

I took a piece and handed it to Charlotte.

“Let’s give it a taste, Charlotte.”

“Really? Isn’t it expedition food?”

“Part of the job is to see if it tastes good or not.”

“Oh, I see!” Charlotte was eager to get to work right away. “Wow! It taste salty, but chewing makes more flavor come. It really good!”

After her rave review, I decided to try it too.

“Oh!”

The great salmon meat was absolutely packed with umami flavor. This was surely proof of how thoroughly it’d been smoked. It was actually pretty salty, but expeditions tended to result in sodium deficiencies, so this seemed perfect.

“It came out really delicious.”

“Smoking is amazing!”

Our great salmon preserves were a total success. I knew the rest of the members would love it too. Charlotte and I were victorious in a battle of our own variety.



Bonus Chapter: Expedition Cooking with Mell and Ulgus

“**HELLO.** I’m Mell Risurisu. It’s time once again for our expedition cooking segment.”

“Hi there, I’m June Ulgus. It’s time for our big job at the end of the book!”

“I’m nervous!”

“Let’s do our best.”



“**HERE** is today’s main ingredient.”

“Oh, is that an apple?”

“That’s right. We’ll be making baked apples, which are great to eat with bread. Ulgus, please read the list of ingredients there.”

“Let’s see. Our ingredients are apples, sugar, butter, cinnamon, raisins, and rum.”

“Since you can’t take butter out on an expedition, you’ll have to have farms at your expedition site share some milk with you.”

“Even the *butter* is homemade?! You’re incredible, Medic Risurisu.”

“Butter is easy to make. Pour boiling water into a jar to sterilize it, then just add milk and shake it for about thirty minutes. The butter and water end up separated, so you’ll have to drain the water, add salt, and freeze it, but then the butter is ready to eat. You should definitely use what’s called non-homogenized milk if you’re going to make butter out of milk.”

“I’m no expert, but that sounds like you can’t make butter with the milk they sell commercially.”

“That’s exactly right. The milk sold commercially is classified as homogenized and won’t turn into butter. So please make your butter with the non-homogenized variety. Ulgus, try a sip of it.”

“Whoa, it’s so rich! Homogenized and non-homogenized milk sure taste

different. I like this non-homogenized one a lot more!”

“That’s because it tastes more like the kind that’s freshly milked.”

“Interesting. But why is homogenized milk the only kind that’s sold?”

“It has to do with quality control. That’s why they never sell it.”

“I see! So it’s something for grown-ups to deal with!”

“Exactly!”

Thirty minutes later, Ulgus’s hard work had produced some finished butter.

“M-Medic Risurisu, it’s really hard to make butter on expeditions.”

“Indeed. It’s tough work. It makes me appreciate farmers.”

“.....”

“Oh! I forgot, it’s not just the butter we’re making.”

“Same...! Uh, what else were we making?”

“Baked apples!”

“That’s right!”

“Start by mixing sugar and cinnamon in the butter. Ulgus, please remove the apple cores.”

“Got it.”

“Once they’re cored, pack the raisins and cinnamon butter in layers, then spread the syrup made with rum over the top of it. Cover the bottom of the pot with the apples, put a lid on top, and let them cook for about thirty minutes. They’re ready to eat once the skin gets wrinkly.”

“They smell amazing!”

“Don’t they? Go ahead and try one, Ulgus.”

“Thank you.”

“How is it?”

“The apple is practically melting in my mouth. It’s sweet, sour, and succulent!”

“Adding raisins really elevates it!”

“Yeah, I feel like it adds depth to the flavor.”

“It’s really good...but honestly, I would never want to make this on an expedition.”

“Making the butter isn’t any fun, huh?”

“.....”

“.....”

“Okay! This concludes episode three of Expedition Cooking.”

“Thanks for everything, Medic Risurisu!”

“You did great too, Ulgus!”

“If reception is positive, we’ll see you next time! I’m June Ulgus.”

“And I’m Mell Risurisu. Thanks for joining us!”

Afterword

HELLO, this is Mashimesa Emoto. Thank you very much for purchasing volume 3 of *Expedition Cooking with the Enoch Royal Knights*. It's thanks to the support of my readers that I was able to reach the third volume! You have my most heartfelt gratitude.

With this book, I am also announcing volume one of the *Expedition Cooking with the Enoch Royal Knights* manga drawn by Renji Fukuhara-sensei. You'll recognize it when you see the utterly adorable Mell on the cover with a plate of croquettes. I also wrote the "Expedition Cooking with Mell and Ulgus" segment on the underside of the manga's cover. Please check it out and enjoy another segment of Mell and Ulgus's laid-back cooking antics.

As for the manga's story, though it might be vain to say this as the author...it's very, very fun! My favorite character is the young nobleman from volume one who failed to elope on the mountain. He was given the name "Zehia" and became a very fleshed-out character. His fiancée, Malfia, is beautiful too. I understand why he wanted to elope with her.

Speaking of beauties, Vice Captain Velrey makes her debut wearing a XXX in the manga. She looked so beautiful too... It was a sight for sore eyes. The vice captain is handsome in the novel version, but please take a look at her feminine beauty in the manga version too.

The intense battle scenes and monster designs are all so wonderful. I find myself thinking, "*They look so cool!*" every time I read it.

But most of all, the meals look incredibly delicious! Reading this manga late at night will make your stomach growl at the sight of such appetizing food. My favorite was the croquettes. The fluffy pancakes also looked yummy. I look forward to the new publication each month. I really hope you enjoy the ways it differs from the novel version.

Now, back to the topic at hand.

The third volume of *Expedition Cooking* sees the arrival of a new member—the fox girl Charlotte. She’s a character who was not in the web version. Charlotte was born from my secret desire to see Akai-sensei draw a dark-skinned girl with fox ears. Akai-sensei’s art is amazing, to put it mildly.

Amelia has grown quite a bit too now, and those illustrations came out looking lovely as well. Album and Sly, the new characters, look adorable too... Thank you for doing another great job with the art, Akai-sensei.

As for my personal life recently, publication of the books continues and my days are totally chaotic. I spent the time around New Year’s working on the manuscript, then had to check over everything right after the holidays. I even cried to my editor, saying, “I can’t go on. I can barely write a sentence in this state.” That was how packed my schedule was...

I’ve managed to overcome most of it now, but I was really backed into a corner at the time. I apologize for the issues back then. I believe I’ll have another book coming out from a different publisher around July, so I hope you’ll check it out if you happen to see it at the bookstore. I will continue to release things like novels for girls and character stories.

My second update is that I recently moved. Finally, I’ve managed to secure a workroom where I can write comfortably. My new place allowed pets, but then the residents protested, so pets were banned... Instead, I spend every morning doting on the seagulls who swim out in the ocean. Seagulls are so cute. There are about twenty of them here, but sometimes, there are up to fifty. Those days feel extra special. Thank you, seagulls.

Now I’ll talk about the new chapters specifically written for volume 3.

“A Shocking Reunion and Candied Nuts” is a new story about Charlotte. It’s especially fun to write about girls being excited about stuff.

“Cooking with Potatoes in the Tropical Rainforest” is also a new story I wrote. You can picture leafy potatoes as taro in this one. Taro boiled in broth is really tasty.

“Interlude: Charlotte’s House-Sitting Adventures and the Sweet Reward” is a chapter about Charlotte hard at work. I hope you can sense how much effort she’s putting into her job.

“Emergency Ration Lunch with Mell, Her Master, and Album” is a training story about the stern-faced master and the gluttonous fairy. *Expedition Cooking* takes place in what would be similar to recent history here on earth, which means they have firearms too. Hunting rifles made their first appearance in this chapter, so I thought that required some extra explanation.

“Side Story: First Time at the Marketplace and Smoked Great Salmon” is a story I originally thought would be a good way to showcase the cool side of Zara, but it turned out differently. I can’t really explain why.

Those were the five new chapters I wrote for this volume. I think they all came out to be entertaining, so I hope you enjoy them too.

Finally, I want to acknowledge how much my editor helped me again with this book. I look forward to working with you again next time. Thank you to Tera Akai-sensei for providing more lovely illustrations here in volume 3. I know you were busy, so I really appreciated your contribution. The designers, proofreaders, staff at GC Novels, and too many others to mention all helped turn this into a wonderful book. I give you all my heartfelt thanks.

To my readers, thank you for always supporting me! It really encourages me. I even received fan letters! It’s hard to read them through my tears. They made me so happy. Thank you all so much. I look forward to seeing you all again in the next volume.



The Inconvenient Life of an Arousing Priestess

By Makino Maebaru Illustration Hachi Uehara

What adventures await a priestess with the inconvenient power to rouse the baser instincts of others and the imperial prince who's unaffected by her?!



The Do-Over Damsel Conquers the Dragon Emperor

By Sarasa Nagase Illustration Mitsuya Fuji

A young woman with overpowered magic gets sent back 6 years after being killed. She takes this second chance at life to get with her greatest enemy, the dragon emperor!



Revolutionary Reprise of the Blue Rose Princess

By Roku Kaname Illustration Hazuki Futaba

She was a queen who died during a revolution. Now she's gone back in time. Her first course of action? Changing her fate by winning over the revolutionary mastermind!



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